



PUBLIC DELIVERABLES FOR THE PROJECT INCLUSION FIRST
101087167-FIRST-ERASMUS-SPORT-2022-SSCP

**Digital platform called INCLUSION FIRST,
 a collection of inspirational stories RUN AND SMILE**

Introduction

Digital platform called INCLUSION FIRST, including a collection of inspirational stories RUN AND SMILE was introduced to the public during the fifth transnational project meeting of the Erasmus+ project, named INCLUSION FIRST (Project Number: 101087167-FIRST-ERASMUS-SPORT-2022-SSCP), convened from **February 23 to 25, 2024, in Malta**. Representatives from the University of Malta, as the consortium partner institution, and ŠK Mladost' from Slovakia, as the project coordinating institution, were in attendance. The meeting aimed to evaluate progress and plan future activities in accordance with the foreseen programme.

In addition to the exchange of expertise, the meeting addressed the dissemination phase summary and for this purpose, **a media conference was organized by the partner organization in Malta**. The partner entities reached agreements on the next steps regarding specific tasks focused on the major project objectives. Prior to the meeting, relevant documentation was circulated along with appropriate articles that promoted fresh thinking on the project concept.

Description of public deliverables

Electronic and printed format, English language, target group - media representatives, sport events participants and audience

Type of public deliverables

Digital platform and publication to be downloaded on www.run-and-smile.com

Lead Beneficiary of public deliverables: ŠK Mladost', SLOVAKIA

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Objectives of public deliverables

The INCLUSION FIRST project shines a spotlight on social inclusion through the values of sports. Its strategic objective is to promote recent developments in the EU's sports sector. At its heart lies **"RUN AND SMILE," a collection of inspirational stories** featuring insights from 24 personalities on various facets of social inclusion. Their motivational journeys are interwoven with pertinent EU sports policies.

A key goal of the project is to bring EU sports policies closer to non-governmental sports organizations, particularly making them more accessible and understandable for stakeholders at all levels, including the local level. This objective was pursued through the **INCLUSION FIRST platform**. Digital platform and publication are to be downloaded on www.run-and-smile.com

The public deliverables cleverly underscored the project name focusing on prioritizing inclusion, while also serving as an acronym for its five core elements: FRIENDSHIP, INNOVATIONS, RUNNING, SUSTAINABILITY, and TEAMWORK.

The proposed consortium aimed to concentrate on the latest EU sports agenda, including the sport policies outlined in the EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024) and the priorities of the EU's Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) in the sports sector. Notably, the consortium developed **Council conclusions on sport as a platform for social inclusion**, as devised during the Maltese Presidency, and **Council conclusions on sport diplomacy**, as formulated during the Slovak Presidency. By collaborating with selected countries, the project focused to practically follow up on the EU sports agenda set forth during the presidencies of Malta and Slovakia in the Council of the EU.

Digital, environmentally friendly, and innovative, the project placed a significant emphasis on the green and **digital transitions, aligning with the priorities of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027** programme and the current call for proposals.

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The public deliverables were well-suited to the call's scope, designed with small-scale partnerships in mind. It aimed to broaden access to the programme for small-scale actors and individuals who were traditionally hard to reach in the sports sector. Furthermore, the project contributed to the establishment and growth of transnational networks and fosters synergies among local, regional, national, and international policies.

Presentation of public deliverables

Digital platform called INCLUSION FIRST, including a collection of inspirational stories RUN AND SMILE was introduced to the public during the fifth transnational project meeting of the Erasmus+ project, convened from **February 23 to 25, 2024, in Malta**. For this purpose, **a media conference was organized by the partner organization in Malta**.

Delegates gathered for a pivotal press conference and presentation of the project work at the University of Malta, setting a significant tone for the event. **Pierre Cassar initiated the press conference** with a warm welcome extended to esteemed guests. With eloquence, he delved into the origins of the project, articulating its genesis and the underlying motivations driving its initiation. He underscored the significance of the project's mission, emphasizing its potential to catalyse positive societal change.

Moreover, Pierre Cassar highlighted the indispensable role of international cooperation in realizing the project's objectives, emphasizing the power of collaboration in addressing complex global challenges. His words resonated with the audience, setting a tone of unity and purpose for the proceedings ahead.

During the press conference, Prof. Andrew Decelis, representing the University of Malta, eloquently showcased the institution's commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge and innovation. With passion and insight, he unveiled several groundbreaking initiatives undertaken

by the university, demonstrating its unwavering dedication to academic excellence and societal progress.

In addition to highlighting the university's achievements, **Prof. Andrew Decelis took the opportunity to introduce 12 exceptional Maltese representatives** selected for their outstanding contributions to social inclusion. With meticulous detail, he provided insights into the unique perspectives and experiences of each individual, underscoring their roles in fostering a more inclusive society.

The majority of the proposed Maltese personalities were present at the press conference, offering attendees the invaluable opportunity to engage directly with these remarkable individuals. Through interactive discussions and dialogue, participants gained deeper insights into the diverse ways in which these representatives are driving positive change within their communities and beyond.

Prof. Decelis's presentation not only celebrated the achievements of the University of Malta but also highlighted the importance of recognizing and amplifying the voices of those dedicated to promoting social inclusion and equality. It was a moment that exemplified the spirit of collaboration and collective action underlying the project's objectives.

Representing the project coordinating institution, **Elena Malikova delivered a presentation on project work**, where she articulated the project's overarching objectives and highlighted its achievements thus far. In addition to outlining the project's goals, she provided good practice of interviews conducted with Slovak personalities, for inclusion in the publication "Run and Smile." The good practice interviews presented towards media are attached for illustration to this document.

These examples served to underscore the project's commitment to showcasing inspiring stories and promoting positive change within communities. Through these interviews, the voices and

experiences of Slovak personalities were brought to the forefront, amplifying their impact and fostering greater understanding among the audience.

The Rector and Pro-rector of the University of Malta concluded the press conference with their inspiring speeches, expressing pride in the university's role within the project. With eloquence and warmth, they emphasized the significance of collaborative educational endeavours in driving meaningful societal change. Moreover, they highlighted the transformative potential of collaborative educational initiatives, emphasizing the importance of initiatives like the project in promoting cross-disciplinary cooperation and fostering a spirit of shared learning and growth.

Together, the speeches delivered by the Rector and Pro-rector of the University of Malta added a profound sense of pride and purpose to the occasion. Their words resonated deeply with the audience, reaffirming the university's commitment to driving positive change through collaborative education initiatives. These speeches further enriched the conference, culminating in its successful conclusion.

The meeting, where the public deliverables were presented to the public concluded with reflections and remarks from the project coordinator, symbolizing a successful culmination of collaborative endeavours and **highlighting the dedication of all participants towards achieving the project's goals.**

After the conclusion of the meeting, delegations departed with a profound sense of accomplishment, having successfully achieved the set objectives and strengthened partnerships within the project consortium. The rich historical backdrop of Malta, combined with the remarkable contributions of the University of Malta, served to underscore the success of the event, **particularly highlighted by the impactful press conference.**

February 25, 2024, Valletta, Malta



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Introduction:

In the dynamic world of anti-doping, where integrity and fairness stand as pillars of athletic excellence, there exists a select group of individuals who not only embody these values but also champion them at every turn.

Today, we have the esteemed privilege of introducing one such luminary. Meet Žaneta Csáderová, fondly referred to as Žanetka, the distinguished director of the Anti-doping Agency of the Slovak Republic. She embodies a unique fusion of expertise in antidoping issues and an unwavering commitment to the ethos of sportsmanship.

As part of our ongoing "Inclusion First" project, Žanetka graciously extends an invitation to explore the intricacies of her sports and professional journey. Through our dialogue, we embark on an expedition to uncover her profound insights into the realm of sports and the indispensable role of inclusion within its tapestry.



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Interview:

Warm greetings, Žanetka! It is truly an honour to have you with us for this exclusive interview as part of our publication, "Run and Smile." Your esteemed reputation in the antidoping community precedes you, recognized for your unwavering commitment to upholding the core values of fair play and integrity.

Without further ado, let us dive right into our conversation and explore the profound significance of sports in your life.

1. Žanetka and sports - how would you characterize yourself from this perspective? What does sport mean to you?

As the first thoughts that come to mind, words like fun and joy emerge. However, upon deeper reflection, we see the importance of rules, which are crucial for sports to function. Respecting the rules ensures integrity and fairness in sports. It teaches us patience, overcoming obstacles, perseverance, and mutual solidarity.

I have come to understand that hand in hand, there must be a system in sports to protect against the negative phenomena brought about by modern times. Balance is important so that sports do not lose their meaning and do not become merely a machine for producing records at the expense of health and values.



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2. Could you take us closer to your professional sports journey? How and why did you personally enter this dynamic field?

It has been 25 years since I, as a graduate of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, decided to address the topic of "DOPING IN SPORT AND ANTI-DOPING MEASURES" and continue my doctoral studies in sports humanities. This is where my career as an anti-doping commissioner began. I do not even know exactly what led me to this topic in sports, but I am glad that I can be part of the anti-doping community. It is a challenging subject and encompasses many interdisciplinary areas.



RUN AND SMILE - ŽANETA CSÁDEROVÁ UNVEILING INTEGRITY: INSIGHTS INTO SPORTS AND VALUES

Working as an anti-doping commissioner has taught me the importance of empathizing with the athlete and working to ensure the best conditions for them during doping control. I also worked at the National Sports Centre in the field of sports diagnostics, where I gradually learned that there are many differences in the sports disciplines themselves, which we currently use in setting up effective targeted testing of athletes.

Ten years ago, I became the director of the Anti-Doping Agency of the Slovak Republic, and gradually, I became more and more convinced of the need to ensure education for athletes and sports professionals. Due to the easier accessibility of prohibited substances in organized sports, we can say that anti-doping education penetrates into the realm of public health in society as a whole.

3. From a broader perspective, what is your opinion on the role of sports in society? Do you believe that sports can contribute to inclusion and diversity?

These days, I see sports as pivotal in influencing society, provided it maintains all the values upon which it was founded. It is crucial to capture and perhaps influence children's behaviour from a young age through playful means, emphasizing values such as equality, inclusion, and respect. By experiencing these values through sports activities, individuals can later be guided towards making the right decisions and thus help maintain the integrity of sports.



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4. In your opinion, what is the essence of inclusion through sports?

In understanding what inclusion actually entails. Activities, such as those included in the "Sport values for every classroom" program, can explain the behaviours that children perceive, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of understanding inclusion as a result.

5. Which sports values are close to you? How has sports influenced you the most?

For me, rules and processes are very important as they show us the way to properly address tasks and provide us with boundaries. Equality and honesty are crucial, ensuring that what we do is done under the same conditions, without making exceptions to achieve our goals unfairly. Teamwork is another value that helps us in our organization to collaborate with other partners in spreading the ideals of clean sport. Overall, the brand of the Anti-Doping Agency represents values, and together we strive to protect them.



6. If you were to name three values that sports have taught you, what would they be? Why?

Fun, fair play, solidarity. In my opinion, relaxation and enjoyment, which sports bring, are crucial for mental health and motivation to progress both in sports and in life. Adhering to the rules set by sports and society maintains balance, fairness, and equal conditions for all participants. Solidarity

and inclusion are important because there is a certain diversity where we are all different, but we all strive for the same goal, which is respecting basic rights and individual success.

7. What has sport given you besides just participating in sports?

A lot of friends, good examples for solving various life situations. And above all, patience in achieving small and big successes in both personal and professional life.

8. We have chosen you for our publication as the face of the VALUES domain, given



your esteemed authority in the field of anti-doping, where fair play is the driving force behind all initiatives. How do you perceive the values of sports and your role as the director of the Anti-Doping Agency of the Slovak Republic?

It is a demanding role that does not bring financial or material security to the sports movement, making it challenging to explain the need and significance of anti-doping in sports.

The importance and purpose of anti-doping rules need to be embodied in examples and in prominent sports figures.

For me, as the director, teamwork at the agency and the message for the next young generation of athletes, who will be symbols of clean sport, are crucial.

9. How can sports contribute to promoting international understanding and cooperation?

International sports federations and organizations serve as examples of collaboration in organizing significant international events, where we see athletes, coaches, and officials from different countries. We observe various political orientations, religious and ethical values, as well as gender and ethnic diversity. What is common is that every sport aims to present itself as a unified community, seeking to provide entertainment and joy in achieving sporting success. I perceive sports as a means through which we can positively highlight emotions and demonstrate international understanding and cooperation.

10. Žanetka and sports competitions – which sports races or competitions do you consider as your highlight?

As a child, I regularly participated in athletic sports competitions. Corresponding to my age, I experienced individual sporting successes that certainly had a significant impact on my life. Over time, there were fewer of these competitions, but I still occasionally participated in various corporate and friendly sports activities. That feeling of joy and fun is still present.

11. What achievements do you value the most? Do you currently have any sports challenges?

I value several achievements in my life. My family, who supports me, is a private success that I cherish. As for professional success, holding the position of director of the Anti-Doping Agency is significant, where I could utilize my education and experience. As for sports challenges, they are modest but existent. It mainly involves regular physical activity appropriate for my age and capabilities. For example, I engage in activities like yoga, Pilates, walking, and other seasonal sports such as skiing and hiking.

12. To conclude our interview, we would like to ask for your opinion on the current sports program of the European Union. What else should the European Union do to encourage more young people to embrace sports as a lifestyle?

In my opinion, the sports program and the topics addressed by the European Union are sufficient. It is up to each country to implement and utilize the EU's potential. Different cultures prioritize different aspects, as we can see in the strategies for sports development in individual countries. Let us start from within to emphasize the need for embracing sports as a lifestyle in our country, and let us use the EU for education and sharing best practices in this field.

PROFILE

Since 2014, Žaneta Csáderová has been serving as the director of the Slovak Anti-Doping Agency. She graduated from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports at Comenius University in Bratislava, with a degree in Physical Education - Geography. She completed her doctoral studies at the Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, Comenius University in Bratislava, defending her dissertation titled "Doping in Sport and Anti-Doping Measures." In 2019, she successfully passed the rigorous examination with the defence of her rigorous thesis titled "Direction of Anti-Doping Strategy in Slovakia." She is a member of the Slovak Society of Sports Medicine. She actively participated in the Anti-Doping Committee of Slovakia, where she worked as a doping commissioner since 1999.



Significant projects in which she has participated:

Erasmus +, project number 400603273, EAC-A05 - 2017, EACEA, "National Observer of Anti-Doping Governance" until 2020,

Erasmus + Sport program "Education and Commitment as a strategy to fight against doping" 622258-EPP-1-2020-1-ES-SPO-SCP, Erasmus + Collaborative Partnership. Call for Proposals 2020.

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Introduction

In the realm of English language teaching, a distinguished group of individuals not only excel in their field but also leave an indelible mark on the essence of sportsmanship. Today, we have the esteemed privilege of introducing one such luminary. Meet Stojka Dubeňová, a distinguished guest with a lifelong dedication to teaching English across various fields and levels. As the former head of the English department within the State Language School in Bratislava, she embodies a unique fusion of expertise in English language education and an unwavering commitment to the ethos of sportsmanship.

As part of our ongoing "Inclusion First" project, Stojka graciously extends an invitation to explore the intricacies of her sports and professional journey. Through our dialogue, we embark on an expedition to uncover her profound insights into the world of sports and the indispensable role of inclusion within its tapestry.

Interview

Warm greetings, Stojka! It is with genuine pleasure that we welcome you to this exclusive interview for our publication, "Run and Smile." Your esteemed reputation as a pillar in the community of English educators precedes you, celebrated for your steadfast dedication to embodying core values such as camaraderie and excellence, qualities that resonate deeply within the world of sports as well.



Today, we are particularly eager to delve into precisely these topics. Let's jump right in with our first question.

1. Stojka, how would you describe your perspective on your sports career?

Reflecting on my sports career, I must admit that it was never a deliberate pursuit from my childhood. Instead, it seemed to unfold through a series of fortuitous events that led me down unexpected paths.

Firstly, I was fortunate to have a physical education teacher in secondary school who was also a renowned handball coach. This connection led me to join the university handball team during my studies, marking the beginning of my involvement in competitive sports.

Additionally, while working part-time as a tourist guide at the archaeological museum, I became involved with an archaeological club and participated in archaeological expeditions. This experience sparked my passion for hiking, opening up new avenues of exploration and adventure.

Another unexpected turn came when my daughter became involved in synchronized swimming, aiming to become a national champion.



As we devoted countless hours to training and perfecting techniques, I found myself drawn into the sport as well. Eventually, I was offered the opportunity to become a judge, leading me to officiate at international competitions across Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

A further serendipitous moment occurred when I was approached by the national football association to teach English to a group of talented football referees via Skype. Despite the initial challenge of mastering the intricacies of the Laws of the Game, this experience immersed me in the world of football for eight fulfilling years. Witnessing the growth and success of these aspiring referees, many of whom went on to become FIFA officials, was incredibly rewarding and inspiring.

Lastly, my journey into yoga began unexpectedly when I covered a class for a colleague and was introduced to a remarkable yoga instructor teaching at the Indian embassy. This encounter ignited





RUN AND SMILE - STOJKA DUBEŇOVÁ

BRIDGING WORLDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

TEACHING AND SPORTSMANSHIP

a new passion for yoga, leading me to embark on yet another transformative journey of self-discovery and physical well-being.

In hindsight, I realize that my sports career has been defined by a series of chance encounters and unforeseen opportunities. Each experience has enriched my life in unique ways, teaching me valuable lessons about discipline, perseverance, and the boundless potential for growth and exploration in the world of sports.

2. From your perspective, what defines the essence of inclusion in sports?

For me as a Bulgarian who lives in Slovakia inclusion means a lot. It means creating a culture of acceptance, belonging, and mutual respect where everyone has the opportunity to participate, thrive, and fulfil their potential, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

The essence of inclusion in sports lies in creating environments and opportunities that embrace diversity, promote equity, and ensure that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, feels welcome, valued, and respected.

Inclusive sports programs provide equal access to participation for all individuals, regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, or any other characteristic. This means removing barriers such as financial constraints, physical accessibility issues, discriminatory practices, or limited opportunities for certain groups.

3. What sports values resonate with you the most? In what ways had sports the greatest impact on you?

Sport holds diverse meanings for individuals, shaped by their unique experiences, cultural influences, and personal perspectives. For me, sports resonate as a source of passion and joy, contributing significantly to my identity and sense of belonging.

Engaging in sports not only keeps me physically active but also propels me forward in both literal and metaphorical senses. Physical activity enhances my opportunities for personal growth and

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RUN AND SMILE - STOJKA DUBEŇOVÁ

BRIDGING WORLDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

TEACHING AND SPORTSMANSHIP

achievement, fostering the development of essential life skills such as goal-setting, resilience, and perseverance. The process of setting goals, overcoming obstacles, and pushing my limits in sports brings a profound sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and fulfilment that transcends into other areas of my life.

Moreover, sports serve as a wellspring of inspiration through the extraordinary achievements of athletes and teams. Witnessing displays of determination, resilience, and triumph fuels my own aspirations and motivates me to pursue my dreams relentlessly. I aspire to emulate the dedication and spirit of those who have achieved greatness in their sporting endeavours, hoping to inspire others on their own journeys.

In essence, sports have had a profound impact on me, shaping not only my physical well-being but also my personal growth, resilience, and aspirations. I believe in the transformative power of sports to inspire, uplift, and unite individuals, and I strive to embody these values in my own journey, aspiring to inspire others along the way.

4. Stojka and sport competition – which sport competition you regard as a highlight in your sporting life?

Reflecting on my sporting journey, I regard any competition I have won against myself as the highlight of my sporting life. These internal battles have led to profound personal growth, self-discovery, and inner fulfilment.

Each victory in these internal competitions represents a journey of self-improvement, resilience, and empowerment. Through overcoming personal obstacles, pushing through self-doubt, and achieving personal milestones, I have emerged stronger, wiser, and more self-aware with each challenge I have faced.

This journey is not just about personal success; it is also about inspiring others to pursue their own paths of self-discovery and growth. By embracing the transformative power of inner competition, I have learned to celebrate my victories and continue challenging myself to reach new heights in my sporting endeavours.

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PROFILE

Stojka Dubenova is freelance teacher of English, interpreter, translator

Education:

- Graduated from Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski, Bulgaria, with a degree in Russian Studies.
- Further specialized in English language and literature at Comenius University in Bratislava
- Engaged in numerous lifelong learning activities, particularly in language learning and teaching, including seminars organized by the British Council and participation in the American Studies Institute for Secondary School Fulbright Commission and ITD-Amherst.



Work Experience:

- Extensive experience as a lifelong teacher, indicating a dedication to education over a significant period.
- Served as the Head of the English department, demonstrating leadership skills and expertise in language education.
- Responsible for leading and coordinating the professional development of the department, highlighting commitment to ongoing improvement and learning.
- Played a crucial role in contributing to the development of the entire school curriculum, showcasing a comprehensive understanding of educational objectives and standards.
- Successfully implemented both local and national curriculum objectives, ensuring alignment with educational standards and goals.

- Acted as a school coordinator and author of Erasmus+ projects K1 and K2, illustrating involvement in international educational initiatives and project management skills.

Interpreter Experience:

- Served as an interpreter at significant events such as the 5th summit of CE presidents in Levoča and meetings of CEFTA members, indicating proficiency in multiple languages and diplomatic communication.
- Also provided interpretation services during official visits of Bulgarian National Assembly delegations in Slovakia, demonstrating versatility and diplomatic skills.

Interests:

- Hiking, yoga, reading books, gardening, swimming, and cold-water immersion.
- Fluent in multiple languages including English, Bulgarian, Russian, and Slovak.



Introduction

Meet Andrea Gondova, a vibrant embodiment of excellence in both the world of finance and the realm of sport. As a Finance Manager at Mondelez European Business Center in Slovakia, Andrea's journey into the world of sports was not merely happenstance; it was a deliberate choice driven by a thirst for personal growth and vitality. In her thirties, she embarked on a quest to refine her



swimming technique under the guidance of a renowned coach, recognizing the transformative power of disciplined training. Today, swimming stands as a cornerstone of her fitness regimen, offering a blend of physical challenge and mental rejuvenation.

With a lifelong dedication to physical activity, she exemplifies the harmonious balance between professional acumen and personal well-being. Born and raised amidst the picturesque mountains of Slovakia, Andrea's affinity for sports was ignited at an early age. From exhilarating ski adventures to invigorating morning runs, she embraced the outdoors as her playground and nurtured a passion for an active lifestyle. From the euphoria of crossing the finish line to the serenity of a sunrise jog, she finds solace and strength in the rhythm of her footsteps and the beat of her heart. Through sports, Andrea has discovered invaluable lessons in patience, perseverance, and discipline - virtues that transcend

the worlds of sports and enter every aspect of her professional journey.

Interview

Charming, young, and beautiful lady who always delights her fellow runners from Železná studnička with her pleasant approach and kind words. As part of the Inclusion first project,

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Andrejka allowed us to peek into the backstage of her sports and professional life. It was a pleasure for us to chat with her about her perception of sports and inclusion through sports. As we delve into Andrea's insights on the intersection of sports and finance, we are invited into a world where rules, standards, and teamwork converge to shape success. In this interview, Andrejka draws parallels between these seemingly disparate domains, revealing the symbiotic relationship that exists between sports and enterprise. We believe you that you will be inspired by her approach as well. Andrejka, the floor is yours!

1. We have selected you for our publication as the face of the FINANCE area. How do you perceive the connection between these two worlds?

The linkage between sports and the financial world highlights the importance of rules, standards, and teamwork in both worlds. I would like to mention the following key parallels:



Adherence to Standards - In the financial world, adherence to reporting standards ensures transparency and comparability of financial results among different companies. Similarly, sports have defined rules and regulations that create a level playing field for all participants.

Performance and Results Orientation - Both sports and the financial sector are focused on performance and achieving results. In sports, athletes strive for personal and team victories, while in the financial world, the aim of companies are positive results and financial success.

Preparation and Training are critical components in both sports and the financial industry. Athletes undergo training to

enhance their performance and physical condition, just as professionals in finance engage in continuous learning and skill development to navigate the complexities of their field.

Team Effort in Collective Sports and Corporate World

Team sports emphasize the importance of collaboration and collective effort. Similarly, in the corporate world, teamwork is crucial for achieving organizational goals. While individual performance matters, the synergy of a well-coordinated team often leads to the best results.

Leadership and Strategy play pivotal roles in both sports and finance. A coach or team captain provides direction in sports, while corporate leaders and executives formulate strategies to guide their organizations toward success.

2. Could you tell us how you entered the world of sports?

I was encouraged to engage in sports from a young age, fostering a lifelong appreciation for exercise. As I grew up surrounded by mountains, I used to ski and enjoyed the ice skating during the winter and in summer it was hiking, cycling and running. It helped me to stay committed to be active throughout the whole life. The decision to enhance my swimming technique with the guidance of a professional coach, especially after my thirties, reflects a proactive approach to personal development and fitness. Now I consider swimming as an excellent full-body workout.

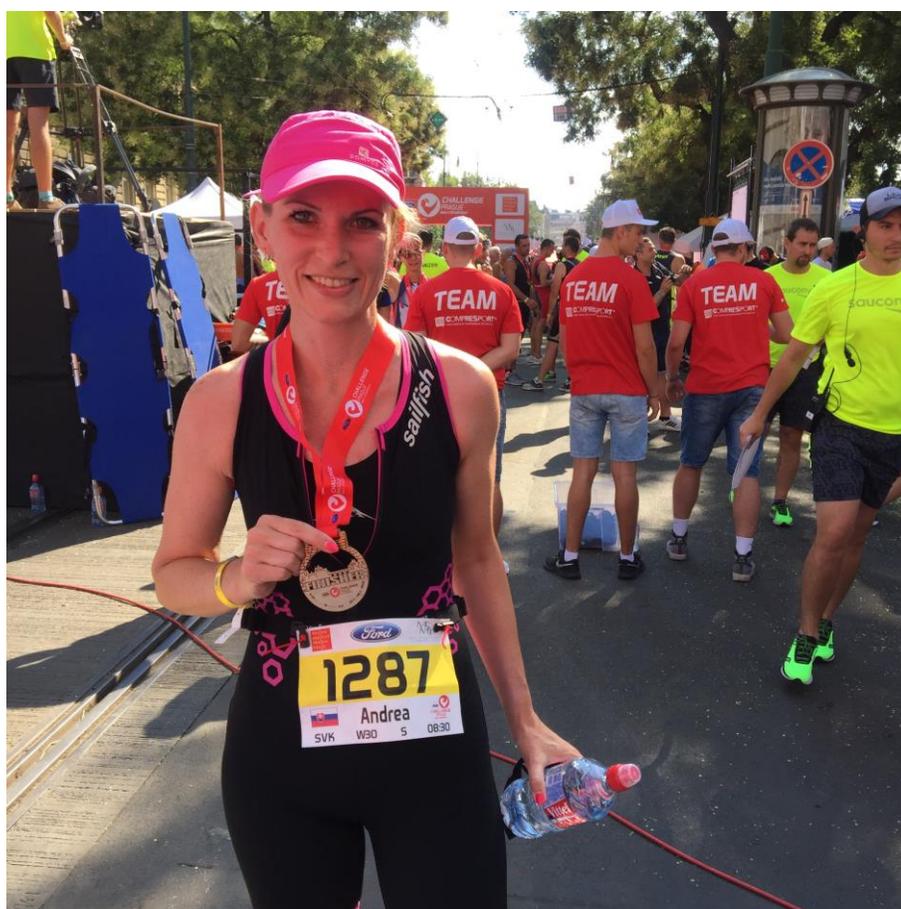


Establishing a morning routine that begins with training, whether it is running, weight training, or swimming, is commendable. Starting the day with physical activity has numerous benefits for both physical and mental well-being. The fact that I miss it when circumstances prevent me from participating in sports highlights the positive impact it has had on my life.

3. Andrejka and sports competition – which sports competitions do you consider your personal highlight?

I found motivation to enhance my swimming skills specifically due to participation in the "Challenge Prague" short triathlon race which was really an exciting and challenging event. Triathlon indeed offer a unique blend of three distinct disciplines – swimming, cycling, and running that require endurance, versatility, and effective energy management. The sense of accomplishment and the personal highlight I experienced during the race reflect not only physical resilience but also mental strength. The combination of swimming, cycling, and running adds variety to the training routine and fosters a holistic approach to fitness.

Engaging in recreational cross-country races and various running events, such as marathon relays, night runs, and women's runs, shows my commitment to continuous improvement and a willingness to challenge myself in different settings. Competing in events within my category provides an excellent opportunity to gauge my performance and celebrate my achievements within a supportive community.





4. What significance does sports have in your life? What does sports mean to you?

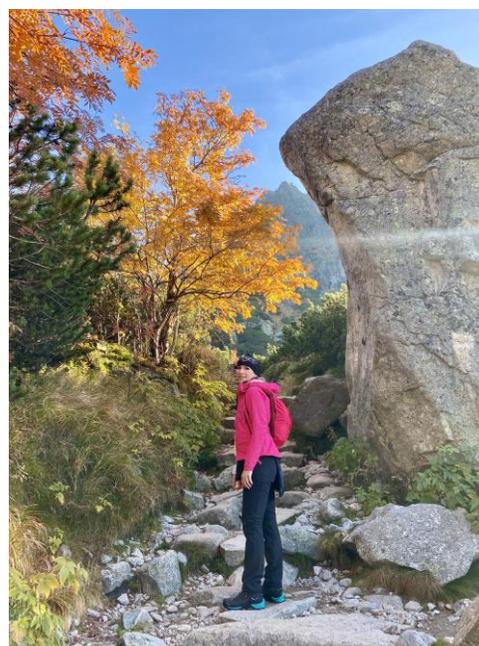
Sports and physical activities are deeply ingrained in my lifestyle, contributing not only to physical health but also to personal growth and a sense of accomplishment. I would like to keep embracing the challenges and enjoying the journey of pushing my limits in various sport activities. Starting the day with physical activity is indeed a powerful routine that can set a positive tone for the entire day.

Clearing head and sorting out thoughts through sports are the therapeutic aspect of my physical activities. I recognize sports as a means to recharge energy and overall, the physical activity not only provides a burst of energy but also enhances overall vitality and resilience.

5. If we look at it from a broader perspective, what is your opinion on sports in general?

The positive effects of sports on overall health and well-being that come with an active lifestyle are numerous. Regular physical activity contributes to cardiovascular health, muscular strength,

and flexibility. It can also aid in weight management and improve sleep quality. Beyond the physical benefits, engaging in sports has profound effects on mental health. The release of endorphins, often referred to as "feel-good" hormones, during exercise can contribute to a more positive mood and improved mental clarity.



6. How do you like the world of sports?

Honestly, my preference is to actively participate in sports rather than passively watch sports broadcasts. Engaging in sports provides us not only physical benefits but also a sense of personal achievement and fulfilment. Choosing to actively participate in sports, even at a recreational level, allows to experience first-hand the joys, challenges, and personal growth that come with physical activity. It is a dynamic way to stay fit, enhance skills, and build a strong connection between the body and mind and others. While watching sports broadcasts can be entertaining and a way to appreciate the skill of professional athletes, the active participation reflects a deeper engagement with the values and benefits that sports bring to individuals. The passion for the active aspect of sports, whether it is running, swimming, cycling or any other activity, is a wonderful way to maintain a healthy and fulfilling lifestyle.

6

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7. If you had to name three values that sport has taught you, what would they be? Why?

I realized that patience, perseverance, and discipline are crucial for success. These qualities or values are indeed universal and applicable across various aspects of life, including both sports and the professional arena.

Patience because in sports, progress often takes time. Whether it is mastering a new skill, improving performance, or recovering from an injury, patience is key. The same applies in professional life, where long-term goals and career advancement may require patience as we navigate challenges and opportunities.

The ability to persist in the face of challenges and setbacks is fundamental to success. In sports, it might mean pushing through tough training sessions or overcoming losses. Professionally, perseverance helps navigate obstacles, learn from failures, and continue working towards goals even when faced with adversity.

Discipline is the bedrock of consistent performance. In sports, adhering to a training regimen and maintaining a healthy lifestyle are essential. In professional life, discipline involves effective time management, work ethic, and adherence to ethical standards.

8. Is there anything we have not asked you about that you would like to share with us within the scope of this interview?

After a brief moment of reflection, I find myself inclined to emphasize the mindset cultivated and fostered through sports—a quality I deeply value as a strength derived from physical activities. The mindset where challenges are seen as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles. The mindset which can contribute to a resilient and adaptable approach in the professional world.

In this sense, I believe that there is a certain transfer of discipline ingrained in sports training, which seamlessly translates into adept task management and organizational skills, further enhancing one's professional capabilities.

PROFILE:

Andrea Gondova works as a Finance Manager at Mondelez European Business Center in Slovakia. Mondelez is a global food company focusing on the snack food and confectionery business, and its portfolio includes iconic brands in various categories like Oreo, Milka, Cadbury and Belvita. Before Mondelez she worked at Dell Technology as Finance Controller.

She graduated from the University of Economics in Bratislava and achieved ACCA certification.

Introduction

In the world where science meets athleticism, there exists a unique convergence of disciplines embodied by individuals like Michal Guttmann, Also known as Miško. A connoisseur of both the scientific intricacies of chemistry and the world of sports, Miško's journey is a testament to the harmonious coexistence of these seemingly disparate realms. Selected as the face of SCIENCE for our publication, Miško unveils the symbiotic relationship between his passion for innovation in chemistry and his dedication to sportsmanship.

From his early days as a fervent sports enthusiast to his illustrious career delving into the depths of chemical discoveries, Miško's narrative is one of perpetual motion, both in the laboratory and on the field. Join us as we delve into Miško's reflections on the intersection of science and sports, unraveling the profound impact of physical activity on his professional endeavors and personal ethos.

Through Miško's lens, we explore the profound significance of sports as a cornerstone of his lifestyle, shaping not only his physical well-being but also instilling invaluable lessons of perseverance, fair play, and teamwork. His journey from the playgrounds of his youth to the international stage of marathons mirrors a life dedicated to pushing boundaries, both in the laboratory and on the track.



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RUN AND SMILE - MICHAL GUTTMANN

Synergy in Motion: Exploring the Interplay of Science and Sports

As we navigate through Miško's insights on inclusion through sports and the transformative power of athletic endeavors, we uncover a vision for a society where the ethos of sportsmanship transcends boundaries, fostering a culture of inclusivity and empowerment for all.

Join us as we embark on a journey through the dynamic intersection of science and sports, guided by the wisdom and experiences of Miško, a true embodiment of the synergy between mind and body, innovation and athleticism.

Interview

Hello Miško, we are very pleased that you have accepted our invitation for an interview for the publication Run and Smile.

We know you from our shared training sessions as an exceptionally diligent and highly reliable person. You are our role model when it comes to sports ethics, but also a great source of knowledge and inspirational ideas.



Discussions with you are always fruitful, so we are even more excited about today's interview. The floor is yours!

1. Miško and sports – how would you characterize yourself from this perspective?

Since my youth, I have been an enthusiastic sports fan and athlete.

2. We have chosen you for our publication as the face for the field of SCIENCE. How do you perceive the connection between these two worlds?

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RUN AND SMILE - MICHAL GUTTMANN

Synergy in Motion: Exploring the Interplay of Science and Sports

From my perspective, it fits excellently. I have been dealing with inventions and discoveries in the



field of chemistry and pharmacy all my life. Practically every day, I had a new invention from various parts of the world in my hands, which I had to evaluate, or develop a patent application for and defend it or solve its practical use, including addressing any disputes related to it. I studied organic chemistry and technology at the Technical University in Bratislava and subsequently law at the university. Both were immensely useful in my work. Sport taught me that improvement in performance comes only through systematic training and perseverance, regardless of what performance level you are at. And in the profession, continuous education is necessary, an effort to understand new solutions, and training resilience to stress.

3. Did sports and physical activities have an impact and influence on your work?

The daily stress and 60-70 hours of work per week brought the need for certain compensation, and morning runs were greatly helpful for over forty years. Occasional participation in running races allowed me to meet other people besides researchers and inventors and at the same time compete with friends, peers, or even myself. From a certain age, of course, I could not improve anymore, so maintaining performance or a slight slowdown was satisfying.

4. What significance does sport have in your life? What does sport mean to you?

Sport is part of my lifestyle; I introduced it to my son, and now also to my grandchildren. Watching races in athletics, swimming, and of course in ball games, especially in football, has always brought

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me joy, although I had little free time. Now, in my advanced retirement age, it is much better with free time, so I can watch, but I must approach my own sports activities more cautiously. Health does not let go.

5. Could you tell us how you entered the world of sports?

I used to live opposite the presidential garden, which used to be full of various playgrounds where I spent several hours daily after coming home from school. I played football every day, not even snow in winter was an obstacle; there was also athletics track and a swimming pool. From the age of ten, I started competitive swimming in Slovan Bratislava. Until the end of November, we trained in an open pool, in winter already in the old Grossling pool.

I managed it until I was seventeen when I realized that weekly 12 swimming training sessions and 2-3 dryland sessions were no longer manageable health-wise. Today, I know that elite training is not for everyone, but only for exceptionally physically gifted people who should also see regular improvement. Although I was in the pool 3-4 times a week during college, I was more involved in teaching swimming to students. I used to joke that when evaluating my sports performance, I was probably the best runner among swimmers and the best swimmer among runners when I occasionally got mixed up among athletes.



6. Miško and sports competitions – which sports competitions do you consider the peak of your sporting career so far?

An enthusiastic amateur in swimming and running probably should not talk about peaks in their sports career, rather about a good feeling after finishing races, sometimes not immediately, for example after finishing a marathon, and occasionally I was satisfied with the achieved time. Fifteen completed marathons are not many, but the satisfaction after finishing several major marathons in Košice and Budapest will stay with me for a long time. After the revolution in 1989, I still ran



regularly, but it was not enough training to complete marathons, so I only participated in shorter races, at most half marathons.

7. In your opinion, what is the essence of inclusion through sports?

By inclusion through sports, I imagine an effort to attract to sports those groups of children and adults whose access to sports is limited or disadvantaged for any reason. For children, it is primarily children from minorities and from socially disadvantaged population groups.



We should not forget about our disabled fellow citizens, whether children or adults. I still believe that in mass sports, quantity is more important than quality. The more people we get involved in regular sports, the better it is for society.

Sports facilities for mass sports should exist everywhere, whether in villages or cities. We only need elite sports where appropriate conditions exist, i.e., a sufficiently broad base of athletes in a given sport and established facilities and clubs with continuous support from public funds.

8. If you had to name three values that sports have taught you, what would they be? Why?

Perseverance and a strong will to overcome obstacles and willingness to explore one's own limits. Competitiveness and adherence to fair play. The journey is the goal, not just the results. Furthermore, it is functioning in a sports team - respect for other athletes and coaches. These and similar values need to be adopted before reaching adulthood, adhered to in the productive age, and passed on to one's family.

9. Which sports values are close to you? How has sports influenced you the most?

Those that I mentioned above. Through regular sports, one meets many people from various professions, and communication with them and shared experiences have pleased me and significantly enriched me.

Even though one doesn't think about it during the work process, meetings with people during sports are extremely important even in retirement because it fills the void left by daily work contacts.



10. Do you currently have any specific sports challenges?

7

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I certainly do not have any sports challenges anymore, but I try to slow down mental and physical decline through movement, which is also a quite ambitious goal. Simply put, I try to have as many relaxing days as possible.

11. What has sports given you besides the sport itself?



Professionally and privately, I have visited many countries, and practically in each one, I have been interested in the conditions for sports in schools from elementary through high schools to universities and how they are financed.



I was particularly interested in various support for athletes at universities, including foreigners studying at these schools. It certainly helped me to gain a more truthful picture of life in many countries. Today, when I have more free time, I am interested in following sports management and the influence of PR and mass media on the development of sports in society.

12. In conclusion of our interview, I would like to ask you, what is your opinion on the current sports program of the European Union? What else should the European Union do to encourage more young people to adopt sports as a lifestyle?

The European Union should lead member states to more significant support for physical education and youth sports in schools of all levels

and at the community level in towns and municipalities. And project proposals should be linked to projects aimed at monitoring the health status of children and youth, so that even less understanding



RUN AND SMILE - MICHAL GUTTMANN

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local politicians see a direct connection between youth sports and improving their health and that investing in sports support will definitely pay off.

PROFILE

Significant national contributor, well-known European patent attorney, with thousands of inventions patented in the field of chemistry and pharmacy, who contributed enormously to the several international project outcomes under the leaderships of the Slovak Republic.

Michal Guttmann is an enthusiastic runner, responsible for the work with senior categories within the sport club. Former high-level runner, he is an advisor on matters of active aging and inclusion of seniors into sport activities within the project EU Sport Values Diplomacy.

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Introduction

In the realm of sports diplomacy, individuals often play a pivotal role in bridging cultural divides, fostering international relations, and promoting cooperation on a global scale. Today, we have the privilege of conversing with Elena Malíková, a distinguished figure in this field, celebrated for her



unwavering commitment to utilizing sports as a tool for diplomacy. Join us as we embark on a journey into Elena's sports career, exploring her contributions to sports diplomacy, sport virtues and social inclusion through sport values.

Interview

Hello Elena, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak with you! You have played a pivotal role behind the scenes of numerous remarkable sports events, whether at the governmental or non-governmental level, overseeing their organization with your meticulous attention to detail. You are widely recognized as an active, determined individual who relentlessly pursues goals while staying grounded and practical. Your wellspring of breathtaking ideas and boundless creativity never fails to inspire those around you.

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Beyond your professional prowess, you possess a gentle soul and a positive outlook, with a remarkable ability to lighten the mood during challenging times. Working alongside you has always been a delight thanks to these endearing characteristics and your unwavering commitment to excellence. Despite your pragmatic nature, you often describe yourself as a dreamer, unafraid to reach for the stars and envision grand possibilities. While some may perceive this as merely building castles in the air, I see it as a testament to your visionary spirit and willingness to explore uncharted territories.

1. My first question naturally is - who is Elena Malíková? How would you describe yourself?

Your introduction and question are indeed thought-provoking, and I am delighted to reflect on my lifelong connection to modern pentathlon. While my active participation in modern pentathlon may belong to the past, the impact of this captivating sport continues to resonate deeply within me. Reflecting on your question, I recognize that modern pentathlon has played a role in shaping my identity. It has instilled within me the spirit of a dreamer, encouraging me to pursue ambitious aspirations with tenacity and courage. Moreover, it has fostered a sense of adaptability and versatility, equipping me with the skills to navigate life's challenges with resilience and grace.

In essence, modern pentathlon has become an integral part of my identity, shaping me into the person I am today - a dreamer, a versatile individual, and a steadfast believer in the power of discipline and determination.

2. What significance does sport have in your life? What does sport mean to you?

Sport is my life, my love. My father introduced me to it and from the outset, I explored a wide array of physical activities, including swimming, skiing, skating, and hiking. While success in sports initially seemed distant and unimportant, it gradually became a defining pursuit through years of dedicated training.

The journey toward sporting achievements was a gradual one, marked by daily practice sessions that gradually became an indispensable part of my routine. Through this process, I learned the

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invaluable lesson that with patience and professional guidance, almost any skill can be mastered. This principle, honed through countless hours of training, not only fuelled my athletic accomplishments but also proved instrumental in navigating professional challenges and endeavours.

3. You are the face of this publication for the area of DIPLOMACY. Is there a connection between sport and diplomacy?

Certainly, the intersection of sport and diplomacy became clear to me only later in my career. I discovered that sports serve as a powerful platform for fostering dialogue, understanding, and



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cooperation among nations, transcending political, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Through sports, diplomatic relations are strengthened, contributing to peace, development, and mutual respect on a global scale.



Moreover, I had a unique opportunity to address this topic at the EU level during my tenure as the Chair of the Council Working Party on Sport in 2016. Leading the EU Member States to consensus on the conception of sports diplomacy at the EU level was the most significant professional experience of my career thus far. I take great pride in our collective efforts, culminating in the

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adoption of the Council Conclusions on Sport Diplomacy during the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU. I believe that this document remains highly relevant today and recommend it to anyone interested in sports diplomacy.

4. In your view, where does inclusion through sports lie?

Building upon my previous reflections, I am steadfast in my belief in the profound and transformative potential of sports to promote inclusivity. One poignant example of this is evident in my weekly Sunday morning running sessions with friends from diverse backgrounds. Through these gatherings, I have come to realize that sports go beyond mere camaraderie, acting as a catalyst for forging meaningful connections and fostering understanding among individuals of varying origins.

Furthermore, through our collective efforts in numerous international projects centered around social inclusion through sport, we have experienced first-hand the dissolution of barriers related to age, race, ethnicity, and ability. In these endeavours, we have witnessed how sports provide a common ground where all participants are united by a shared passion and purpose.

5. Could you share which sports values resonate with you the most, and how has sports influenced you personally?

The values of discipline, teamwork, and resilience ingrained in sports have indelibly influenced my character and perspective on life. Sports have imparted upon me the significance of perseverance and adaptability, qualities that have proven indispensable in navigating both personal and professional challenges.

However, the ethos that resonates most deeply with me is the concept of "embracing the joy of effort." This principle has been integral to my life philosophy since my teenage years and continues to be a guiding force in all my endeavours. It serves as a perpetual wellspring of inspiration, propelling me forward in my daily pursuits.

6. Do you still have any sporting challenges?

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Yes, I do, although with age, I have let go of many and even completely abandoned some of them. I probably will never skydive or try paragliding, which tempted me for many years. I have not gathered the courage for it yet, and with age, I probably never will. Nevertheless, I still find immense pleasure in running and occasionally join various races, which continue to bring me joy and satisfaction. Lately, swimming, cycling, and hiking have also found a place in my routine. I approach these activities with moderation, guided by a personal system and inner voice that prioritizes their benefits in supporting my journey of 'aging gracefully'.

In any case, I consistently find immense pleasure in standing atop the podium in running races within my age category, spanning not just national but international events as well. I hold deep



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gratitude towards the remarkable achievements of my fellow competitors, as their presence serves as a motivating force that enhances our collective enjoyment in these races.

7. Is there anything we have not asked you about that you would like to share with us in this interview?

Indeed, during this interview, a memory resurfaced that I am grateful to share. My former horse-riding coach always emphasized the importance of keeping one's chin up, heels down, and a smile on the face while riding. He believed this was crucial for progress and quality performance. As a teenager, I did not fully grasp the significance of the smile. Finally, it was not until later that I realized the uplift it brings, often aiding in perseverance and progress during tough times. Over the years, I have come to see how integral a smile is in my everyday life. As 'SMILE' is in the title of this publication, I am thankful for the chance to contribute. Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts. It has been a pleasure conversing with you.

PROFILE

Elena Malíková works at the Government Office of the Slovak Republic and has extensive managerial experience in civil service. Former Director of Department of Education and International Affairs at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (2007-2017), Chair of the Council Working Party on Sport under the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2016), Head of Department of Education at the National Sport Centre in Slovakia (2004 - 2007).

Non-governmental work comprises both professional and voluntary activities, notably within the International Modern Pentathlon Union - an



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appointed member of the Pierre de Coubertin Committee and elected member of the Business Affairs Committee (2004-2008), Secretary General of the Slovak Modern Pentathlon Association (1993-2003), Chair of the Slovak Olympic Academy (as of 2021).

Awarded by Trophy of the International Olympic Committee on Olympic sport and literature (2001), Editor-in-chief of the National Sport Centre Revue (2004-2007), Jury member of the EU #BeInclusive Award of the European Commission (2017) and the EU #BeActive Award of the European Commission (2022), author of publications and press articles on sport, social inclusion, values and Olympic education.

Passionate for intercultural dialogue, sport diplomacy and foreign languages, fluent in English, French, Russian, with sound knowledge of Polish, German and Japanese. Interested in sport and health enhancing physical activities, notably swimming and running, inclusive marathons. Proud finisher of three marathons in New York, USA (2005), Treviso, Italy (2006) and Bratislava, Slovakia (2007) and a half marathon in Cancale Saint Malo, France (2005).

Former high-level modern pentathlete, member of the national team of Czechoslovakia, later of Slovakia (1988-2000), a multiple national champion and World Cup finalist, participated in numerous foreign camps, including an educational and training camp at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas (1990).

Graduated at the University of Economics in Bratislava, educational background covers post-gradual French language specialisation “Le Français du sport” at the Université Michel de Montaigne in Bordeaux and studies in sports management at the University of Poitiers, France focusing on Executive Masters in Sports Organisation Management - MEMOS programme guaranteed by the International Olympic Committee.

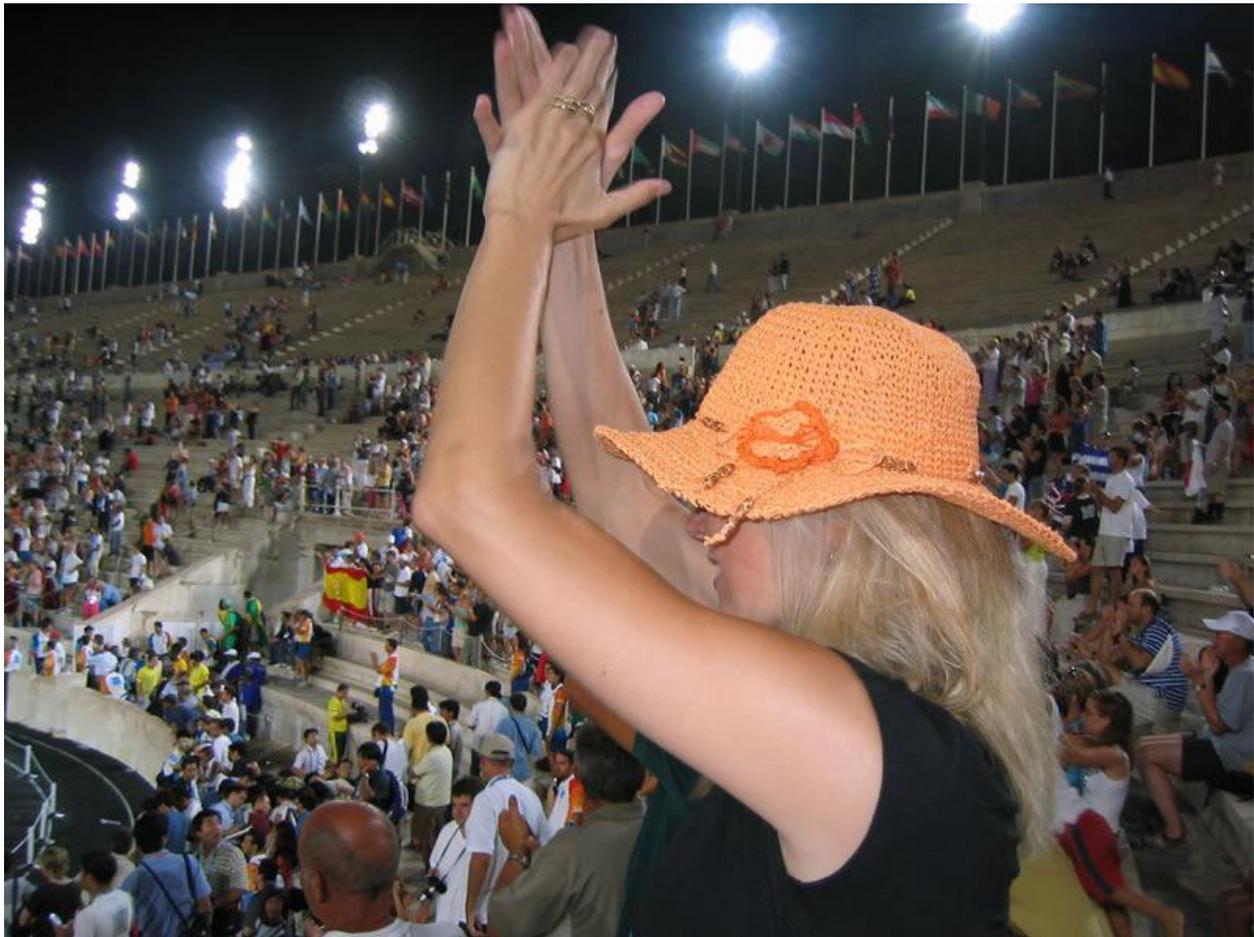
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Introduction

Our first encounter took place in Athens, albeit not in the traditional sense of meeting face-to-face. Marcel had just completed his Olympic marathon to thunderous applause at the Panathinaikos Stadium. As I sat among the spectators, a surge of pride swept over me, knowing we hailed from the same country. The emotions stirred by that moment remain vivid to this day. Marcel Matanín, the final runner of the 2004 Olympic Games marathon, crossed the finish line amidst an electrified stadium.



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RUN AND SMILE - MARCEL MATANÍN THE MARATHON MAN'S SPORTING ODYSSEY

As the closing ceremony prepared to unfold on the opposite end of Athens, Marcel stood as a beacon of endurance and determination, representing the epitome of a marathoner from Slovakia.

Despite his accolades and achievements, Marcel remained remarkably modest, yet undeniably determined and always exuding high spirits. Our paths crossed multiple times, thanks to the whims of fate. Each interaction with Marcel left an indelible mark on me, propelling me forward in my own journey. I am confident that this



interview with Marcel will likewise leave a lasting impression on you, offering insights and inspiration that resonate long after reading.

Interview

Warm greetings, Marcel! From your current professional endeavours in Luxembourg, we extend heartfelt salutations. It is an honour to have you join us on our online platform for this exclusive interview featured in our esteemed publication, "Run and Smile." Your illustrious journey as a marathon runner has captured the hearts of many, earning you recognition for your unwavering dedication to pushing boundaries and epitomizing the true spirit of sportsmanship. Today, we have the privilege of delving into the depths of your remarkable career and gaining insights into the

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guiding principles that have fuelled your extraordinary success. Without further ado, let us embark on this enlightening journey with our first question

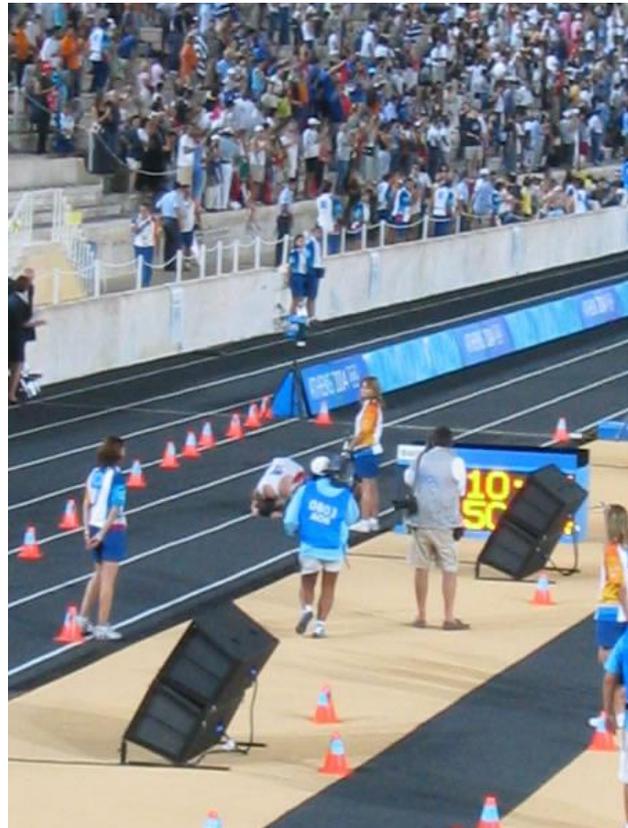
Marcel, let me start by asking how you perceive your active sports career?

Well, I must say, I perceive it quite positively. I have been a multiple-time Slovakian champion, participated in world championships, European championships, and Olympic Games, which I consider my most significant achievements. Therefore, when I reflect on it, I definitely see my active sports career in a very positive light.

1. What was it like at the 2004 Olympics?

Yeah, I still get goose bumps just thinking about it. It was not easy. I had stomach issues, and things did not go as smoothly as I had envisioned or trained for.

However, I coped with all those obstacles and managed to overtake many people who were struggling even more. As I later found out, everyone I passed eventually dropped out. Yes, the applause at the finish line was incredible. I did not realize I was finishing last, but the spectators did, and perhaps that is why they cheered so enthusiastically for me.



Stefano Baldini still jokes when we meet, saying that I achieved far greater success than he did, even though he won the Olympic marathon. Maybe he is right. The Olympics itself cannot be compared to anything else. Although I have participated in much larger and more prestigious events

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with more participants, such as the New York Marathon, the Olympics are the Olympics, and nothing else can compare.

2. Why did you establish Marcel Matanín's Running Academy?

At that time, there was nothing like it in Ivanka, the village on the outskirts of Bratislava, where I currently reside. My goal was to concentrate my efforts on promoting physical activity among children in the area. My daughter showed an interest in sports, initially following in her father's footsteps (I mean mine), although certainly also influenced by her mother. Her desire to train sparked a chain reaction – first, a couple of her friends joined in, then a few more, until our group grew in numbers. It was like a natural progression, akin to a flowing stream, prompting us to conceive the idea of establishing a sports academy. While running serves as the cornerstone of our activities, our program encompasses a broader spectrum, including overall physical preparation, jumping, and a javelin-like throwing exercise.



3. Where do you believe the essence of inclusion through sports resides?

Sport transcends mere physical activity; it instils vital values such as self-discipline, respect, and camaraderie. Take, for example, the enduring friendships formed over three decades with fellow marathoners like Robert Štefko, Miroslav Vanko or Vladislav Lipovský. These enduring bonds exemplify the profound impact of sports in my life, fostering connections that endure through time.

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While performance and training are crucial components, the true essence of sports lies in its multifaceted offerings, which I have come to appreciate more deeply over time.

4. What is it like to have a Marathon Major? Which races are included in this category?

The Marathon Majors represent the pinnacle of achievement in the running world, encompassing six prestigious marathons across the globe. My journey with these iconic races began in Berlin in 2014, a moment that ignited my passion for long-distance running. Initially, I had not set out to



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conquer all six majors, but after experiencing the electrifying atmosphere of the New York City Marathon in 2016, I found myself eager to pursue further challenges.

Chicago in 2018 and London in 2019 provided exhilarating tests of endurance, each race adding layers to my love for the sport. The anticipation for Boston in 2020 was palpable, yet the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic forced a postponement, extending my wait until 2022. Despite the delay, the resilience of the running community prevailed, and I eagerly awaited my chance to tackle the historic Boston course.

Completing the Marathon Majors collection became a personal milestone, culminating with the Tokyo Marathon in 2023. What brought me immense satisfaction was not just the completion of these races but the fact that I qualified for five out of six marathons with the required time limit. Even for the sixth one, with a time limit of 2:44, I knew that with further dedication and training, I could meet the challenge, having previously surpassed a limit of 2:49 in Kosice.

However, for my final marathon, I made a conscious decision to run for a greater purpose, dedicating my race to support a foundation for children battling cancer. While it required financial investment on my part, the opportunity to contribute to such a noble cause far outweighed any monetary considerations. I have no regrets for this choice, as it enriched my marathon experience with a deeper sense of fulfilment and meaning beyond personal achievement.



5. What achievements do you value most?

When reflecting on my most valued achievements, participating in the Olympics stands out as a pinnacle moment in my athletic journey. Alongside this prestigious accomplishment, I cherish the

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memories of earning medals in mountain running as part of a team, as well as clinching two individual titles and securing silver medals in Masters mountain running events.

Another source of pride stems from my dominance in cross country running, clinching the national championship title an impressive nine times consecutively. This consistency is a testament to my dedication and perseverance in the sport, a feat not easily achieved by many.

One particularly memorable highlight occurred during the 2003 Košice Marathon, the oldest in Europe and second oldest globally. Despite it being my first-ever marathon, I stunned myself with



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a fourth-place finish, clocking an impressive time of 2:17:55, thus meeting the B standard for the Olympics. Marián Šimo, a renowned Slovak sports journalist, reached out to deliver the staggering news. I was in disbelief – I had not dared to dream of such an outcome, nor had I tailored my training specifically for this achievement. This unexpected achievement reshaped my goals, leading to further successes, including confirming my qualification for the Olympic Games with a time of 2:17:22 in Zurich.

Following this significant milestone, I embarked on a natural progression in life, completing my university studies in May 2004 before representing my country on the grand stage of the Olympics in Athens, marking the culmination of my competitive career.



6. When it comes to present challenges, Marcel, are there any new athletic goals you are pursuing?

In terms of my current challenges, I am focused on maintaining a balanced approach to my athletic endeavours, ensuring that I prioritize both physical health and enjoyment. As for my future aspirations, I am keen on exploring different avenues within sports, whether it is trying out new activities or honing my skills in familiar ones. Ultimately, I aim to continue deriving fulfilment from my sporting pursuits while embracing whatever opportunities come my way.

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7. Is there anything I have not asked you about that you would like to share with us in this interview?

I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to my coaches, whose guidance and support have played an instrumental role in shaping me into the runner I am today. I owe a significant debt of gratitude to two remarkable individuals in particular - Pavol Madár and Miroslav Okál'. Their unwavering dedication, expertise, and belief in my potential have been invaluable throughout my athletic journey. Their mentorship not only honed my physical abilities but also instilled in me the resilience, determination, and passion necessary to overcome challenges and achieve my goals. I am truly fortunate to have had the privilege of learning from such exceptional coaches, and I will forever be grateful for their invaluable contributions to my development as an athlete.

PROFILE

I was born in Vranov nad Topľou in 1973, but I grew up in the small village of Tovarnianska Polianka, where my physical education teacher introduced me to sports. It was here that I began my athletic journey, particularly focusing on running.

After completing elementary school, I attended high school in Humenné, later transferring to the Eight-Year Sports Gymnasium in Košice, where I truly dedicated myself to running under the guidance of a professional coach. It was through the mentorship of one of my coaches, Miroslav Okál', that I reached the Summer Olympics in Athens in 2004.



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Following the conclusion of my competitive running career, I briefly dabbled in local governance in the village where we eventually settled. However, my passion for sports persisted, and I received an offer from the organizers of the ČSOB Bratislava Marathon to join them. This opportunity led me to become the sports director of the ČSOB Bratislava Marathon, prompting me to relocate to Ivanka pri Dunaji, where I have been living with my family ever since.

I am a multiple-time champion of Czechoslovakia and Slovakia in various running disciplines, including track, cross country, half-marathon, and marathon events.

Projects I have collaborated on:

ČSOB Bratislava Marathon
PTS Athletics Meeting
European Cross Country Championships - Šamorín 2017
Challenge Šamorín
Telekom Night Run
High Tatras Night Run
Carpathian Triathlon

Significant Sports Achievements:

Olympic Games:

2004 Olympic Games in Athens: 82nd place

Cross Country Events:

2004 European Cross Country Championships in Thun, Switzerland: 63rd place
2005 European Cross Country Championships in Ljubljana, Slovenia: 42nd place
2006 World Cross Country Championships in Faro, Portugal: 86th place
2006 European Cross Country Championships in Malmö, Sweden: 50th place

Mountain running:

European Championships Sestriere, Italy 6th place
European Championships Ebensee, Austria 4th place

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World Championships Innsbruck, Austria 7th place
European Championships Trento, Italy 8th place
World Masters Championships
Zagreb 1st place
World Masters Championships
Poland 1st place

Personal Records:

800 meters: 2:00:00
1500 meters: 3:55:39
3000 meters: 8:21.60
3000 meters (steeplechase): 9:20.59
5000 meters: 14:35.48
10,000 meters: 30:18
10 km road race: 29:14
Half-Marathon: 1:05:14
Marathon: 2:17:22



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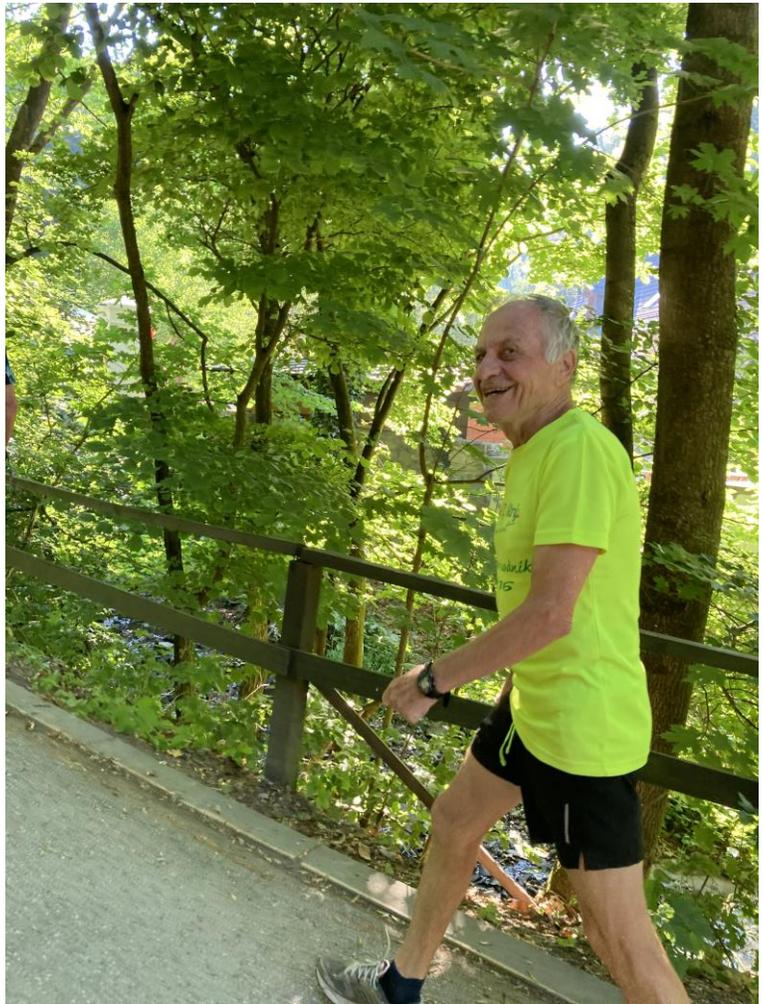
Introduction:

Step into the world of Viliam Novák - a life intricately intertwined with the pursuit of athletic excellence, particularly in the realm of running. For Viliam, sports are not merely a pastime; they represent a profound journey of self-discovery and resilience, shaping every facet of his being.

Viliam's affinity for sports blossomed amidst the scenic vistas of his upbringing, where the tranquil ambiance of Kremnica provided the backdrop for his formative years. Here, amid the rugged terrain and snow-laden slopes, the seeds of his passion were sown, laying the foundation for a lifelong commitment to athletic endeavor.

Throughout his storied career, Viliam's pursuits extended far beyond the boundaries of conventional academia. As a dedicated scholar at the Faculty of Civil Engineering, his quest for knowledge mirrored the rigor and discipline of his athletic pursuits. From the intricacies of water management to the complexities of scientific inquiry, Viliam's endeavors exemplified the harmonious convergence of intellect and athleticism.

As Viliam reflects on his journey, he recognizes the transformative power of sports to uplift, inspire, and unite across



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generations. From the relentless pursuit of personal bests to the enduring camaraderie of the running collective, each chapter of his story serves as a testament to the timeless allure of athletic pursuit.

Join us as we unravel the tapestry of Viliam Novák's sporting legacy - a testament to the enduring power of sports to ignite the human spirit and propel us toward new heights of achievement.

Interview

Hello Vilko, it is always a pleasure to connect with you. We understand that you perceive the true essence of sports to extend beyond mere physical exertion; it serves as a profound catalyst for mental rejuvenation and social connection. Amidst the demanding pursuit of academia, you have found solace in the rhythmic cadence of your footsteps, with each stride bearing witness to your indomitable spirit and unwavering resolve. Together, we have shared countless workouts and races, fostering bonds that transcend mere competition. Our hours spent engaged in intriguing discussions about everything and nothing have enriched our lives. Now, we are eager to hear your insights today. Let's begin with the first question.



Sport and Vilko – what does sport mean to you?

Sports activities, especially running, are an integral part of my life; it is not merely a saying - sports form a significant component of my daily routine, primarily as a means of relaxation. My involvement in sports began in early childhood, during my school years. I spent my school years, up to eighth grade, in Turiec, a small village near the springs of the Turiec River, in Dolný Turček.

We children spent our free time outdoors, in the forests or meadows around the village. Naturally, we got around by running. Whenever us boys gathered for various games, we would exclaim, "let's go run." Thus, good fitness was ingrained in me from a young age. Moreover, it had practical

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significance as well because we had chores at home and in the garden, such as preparing firewood for heating, where "running" was not only enjoyable but also useful.

What are your thoughts on the intersection of sports and work?

I spent my entire active life at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAV). Many people think that it mainly involves sitting at a desk or experimenting in the laboratory. In many cases, it is true, but I worked at the Institute of Hydrology SAV, and the problems I contributed to solving were related to the movement of water in nature, quantifying it depending on the properties of the environment. The movement of water in nature is studied in a scientific discipline called hydrology. Consequently, a significant portion of our research activities take place in nature. That meant field trips, digging holes, taking soil samples, and conducting field measurements of ongoing processes.



I remember running from our workplace in the area of the Welding Research Institute in Bratislava to the forest on Kamzík and back with branches of beech and hornbeam trees necessary for measuring the critical moisture and critical water potential of leaves. Interestingly, when a branch

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with leaves is broken off a tree, that broken part of the tree doesn't immediately realize it's been detached. It only realizes later when the leaf moisture decreases and its water potential increases; they respond by closing the leaf stomata to reduce transpiration and increase their chances of survival. Our goal in this matter was to measure leaf moisture when the stomata begin to close, or in other words, to measure the critical moisture of the leaves. The relevant measurements were made in the laboratory in a wind tunnel. My better-fed colleagues could not understand why I ran up and down, an activity "undignified" for a scientific worker... However, they could not advise me on a better method to get tree branches into the laboratory.

That is just one part of the positive effects of good fitness on my work. The most important impact is the mental regeneration of the body. Anyone who has worked "mentally" knows that even if they have not exerted themselves physically, after a day's work, they feel mentally drained, lacking the desire for anything (except food) and needing more time to mentally recover and be able to focus on work again. That is when it's time for sports regeneration.

Whenever possible, I ran into the Small Carpathians and ran a few kilometers; after an hour of



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running, I felt like a different person. Though tired and sweaty, mentally refreshed, charged with energy. That is how I regenerated and "recharged" throughout my life. So, I owe sports not only for fitness, health, but also for good results at work.

How significant is sport in your life?

It could be answered very simply: sport is significant for my life. Why? When I ask myself why sport is so important to me, I realize that there are several reasons. Perhaps the most important one is that I enjoy running, I find joy in running. When I go out into nature and run a bit, I feel good about how my body functions, I feel joy in how everything works.



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The second reason is good running company. The method of natural selection among runners works in such a way that over time, groups of runners (and of course, female runners too) are formed who are close not only in running abilities but especially in their views on life. Thus, groups are formed that run together for decades, and they are always glad to meet and talk; of course, during the run...



In our running group, some have been running together for four decades, and we still enjoy it. During the run, we share our views on the world, but also on current events. It is pleasant and enriching at the same time. Moreover, within running groups, trips to races at home, to European

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countries, and even overseas are organized. A proven group ensures pleasant moments during sports stays. The social dimension of running is perhaps dominant. Runners are, in most cases, people accustomed to exertion, tolerant, so groups formed on this basis are cohesive and last for decades.

Also, an important consequence of sports is good fitness and, above all, increasing the body's resistance to diseases as a result of "training" all internal organs, which are extremely stressed during runs (especially marathons), thus making them resistant to external influences. And as a bonus, there is a slim figure and a good appearance of a runner. I do not think that runners run to lose weight; people who run to lose weight are "non-runners," and in such cases, it is a phenomenon that usually ends after a few weeks because running "hurts," and losing weight is not as fast as some "runners" imagined.

What about your "entry" into the world of sports?

I truly immersed myself in sports during high school in Kremnica, where we moved from Dolný Turček, a small village near the springs of the Turiec River. At Kremnica High School, besides excellent teachers in various disciplines, we also had a great physical education teacher, Vojta "Pica" Rahla, who graded us based on how we met the limits set for each sports discipline. Basically, whatever you could run, jump, or throw, you got a grade for it. Only a few of us had the PPOV badge (prepared for work and defense of the country), and it was never missing on the lapel of our coats; we even wore it on dates. In winter, we exercised with equipment. And it was tough, indeed. The teachers' uncompromising approach to grading meant that we went to the gym in the evenings to practice equipment routines and in summer to the athletic field. I have the impression that Kremnica was perhaps the only town in Slovakia with a specialized athletic stadium. No combination with a soccer field: just athletics. The track was, of course, cinder; half of the field was on a slope, so it slightly bent, but that was not a problem. Because I did not belong to the robust students, I focused on running; it was acknowledged that I would not excel in shot put. I remember in the tenth grade, I ran a kilometer in 3:35, which was an A (the limit was 3:40), there were about three of us who achieved this. That is why the teacher nominated me for local youth competitions,

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possibly a two-kilometer run, where I did well (how exactly, I do not remember), and that motivated me for future running activities. A young person needs some impulse to get hooked; they must feel they can be successful; it's hard to talk about a love for sports in the beginning, it comes later, after one has "run," "won," and so on.

Moreover, Kremnica was the center of cross-country skiing in the fifties and sixties; names like Čillík, Fusko, Párička, Slosiariková, still ring a bell for at least the older generation. I want to say that sports were an integral part of young (but also older) residents of Kremnica. Basically, everyone skied; I did too. However, I was a newcomer from Turček, and at thirteen, I was already "too old" to be a promising skier. I envied my peers proudly parading in tracksuits with the letters ŠŠD, which stands for sports school for youth. These were my sporting beginnings, which laid the foundation for later endurance running.

After graduation, I applied and was accepted at the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering of SVŠT in Bratislava; it didn't suit me (not that I was a weak student, no, but there was less math and physics, and I missed that), so the four of us transferred to the Faculty of Civil Engineering, specializing in Water Management, aka "water," which I really enjoyed and still do.

On this faculty, in the same "circle," there was also Vojto "Čičo" Kovačič from Pezinok, who ran orienteering races. When he told us about the races, I remarked, "I used to run in high school too"; it was more than two years ago. Really? Vojto was surprised. Come to Pezinok with us; we have an orienteering section. Why not? I bought some sneakers and went to Pezinok with Vojto. The team there was excellent; orienteering is incredibly interesting; I found plenty of good friends there and experienced my first failures, but also victories. Orienteering has the property that you run for hours and hours and do not even notice the time; you train heaps, and it does not hurt. Great preparation for marathons, which I did not even dream of back then. And another advantage: the Pezinok section was called Lokomotíva Pezinok, which meant we got free tickets for races across Czechoslovakia, arranged by the excellent organizer Pišta Chovanec. It was a big advantage for students. Pezinok was a top-notch team; we had the national champion Gusta Barták among us. Simply put, Pezinok was great. But all good things come to an end; I got married, children came,

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and there simply was not time for training and racing. Plus, work. I went through the admission process for a study stay at the former Institute of Hydrology SAV and had to (if I wanted to be successful, there was no other way) work systematically; what I did not finish at work, I had to finish at home. Saturdays were not free yet, and leaving the kids on the only free day, Sunday, was not an option. So, whether I liked it or not, I had to give up racing. Not sports, though. I ran as much as I could, cycled, did hiking.

It was not until just before turning forty that I basically ran the Devín – Bratislava race without preparation; I simply could not resist running it... And there I met a group of runners from the informal Železná studnička Bratislava club; it was a group of runners who, already in 1986, regularly trained three times a week, and many of them were marathoners... I joined them, and that is how it started. I realized that I was not any worse than them, and if they could run the marathon, why could not I?

How would you characterize your running experience and achievements?

Right from the start, I must say that sports have been (and still are) a hobby for me; I never had ambitions to achieve top performances in running, and it must be said that I did not have the predisposition for elite sports. During the critical years between my twenties and thirties, there were plenty of runners around me who were better and faster than I was. It is true that with age, I "relatively" improved, and I often found myself on the podium in veteran age groups. I started dedicating myself more intensively to sports (or more precisely, running) after my thirties when the kids grew up, and I had more time for sports. Despite work and "family" commitments, I continued to be active in sports, running, cycling, and cross-country skiing, but I did not participate in races, except for the White Trail of the SNP, where I completed more than 15 editions of these ski races.

What do I value most from the achieved results? It is definitely my first marathon with a time under three hours (2:57:20), completed at the Small Carpathian Marathon in Trnava in 1987 at the age of 45, and (for interest's sake) the same time I achieved a year later at the IBUSZ Marathon in Budapest. In my veteran age, I won marathons in Ljubljana, Regensburg, Copenhagen, Lublin, and

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Budapest. I highly value the victory at the Moscow International Peace Marathon in Moscow in 2012, in the M70 age category with a time of 3:36; another success (for me) is the 3rd place in the M75 age category at the 127th edition of the oldest marathon in the world in Boston in 2018. The time was not remarkable (4:17), but reportedly it was the toughest conditions in the history of this



marathon. It was cold (4 °C), pouring rain, and a strong headwind. Perhaps my favorite marathon is the MMM in Košice; after all, it is the oldest continuously held marathon in Europe. Unfortunately, I could not run it under 3 hours (best time 3:00:40). Overall, I completed 119 marathons, the last one in 2019 in Copenhagen. I value the fact that I finished all the marathons I started.

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To the most cherished results, I would perhaps add four starts and four victories at the oldest road race on the continent, Běchovice - Prague. It is as "old" as the Boston Marathon, and in 2023, the 127th edition was held. Of course, we are talking about victories in the respective age category.

However, what I value the most is that despite being born in 1942, I am still on my feet and can enjoy running in the company of good friends.

What is your understanding of "Inclusion through Sport"?

Most collectives are formed and optimized for the purpose of achieving a predetermined goal; this is how work teams are formed; in such cases, the opinion of a collective member is not important, but rather their ability to be a valid part of it.

"Non-working" collectives usually come together spontaneously because their members share common interests. One of the possibilities that bring people together is sport, in this case, running. "Running" collectives are most often formed by chance contacts during running races, during nature



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runs, where kindred spirits agree on common training sessions. Such groups of runners last for decades. One of them is also a group of runners forming an informal running section called Železná studnička.

We have been running together for over 40 years, the members of the group change, but the core

group is still here. What is interesting about groups of male and female runners is that they informally bring together a wide range of runners, regardless of age, gender, or occupation. This is another "added" value of informal groups of



runners; we meet runners of different ages, occupations, and backgrounds. This has created a rare opportunity for me to meet fellow runners whom I would not have met under other circumstances. For me as an athlete, this is enriching; I have the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of a bricklayer, or a bus driver, or a civil servant. Running allows you to explore the world through people with different life experiences, yet we understand each other. Running is truly a miraculous elixir that brings together diverse people into one whole.

What three values have you learned from participating in sports?

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Nothing in life (or in sports) comes for free. If you want to be successful, you must work hard (train). A good (sports) team is motivating and enriching (not only in sports) life. You can achieve much more than you think; mentality is important, and it is shaped in races and training.

How has sports influenced me the most?

Sports (especially marathons) have taught me not to give up. I have realized that success can only be achieved through hard work; this applies even outside of sporting activities. Even strenuous training can be enjoyable in a good team. Sports (and running in particular) may be an individual sport, but it is the running collective that makes it what it should be; a social event, so a good team is essential for running to become a source of enjoyable experiences. I enjoy going to training mainly for that collective spirit; otherwise, I could run alone at a time that suits me.

Do I have any sports challenges?

I realize that I will not improve anymore, and my personal record times are gone. I would still like to run for another year, and I would be glad if the condition of my body (and soul) allows it. Above all, I would like to run half marathons in Bratislava, Rajec, and Kosice. How long will I continue to run? I do not know, but I will try to stay "above water" for as long as possible.

What did sports give me besides just playing sports?

I am convinced that thanks to sports, I have been successful in my career, and sports have contributed to (until now) good health. Sports also allowed me to see the world because I completed more than half of the marathons (64) abroad, including 12 in the USA. Mental relaxation through sports is a great thing, and I recommend it to everyone. Moreover, I found my best friends among runners. In work, there is still rivalry; there is not that natural (voluntary) selection of team members as there is in voluntary activities like sports. Of course, there is also great rivalry in sports, but it is friendly rivalry. Even if I lose (to someone), I am happy to sincerely congratulate them, and we remain friends. So, running is not just a tough battle for the best results, but it is a social activity that brings me (us) joy from sports and from a good team, and ultimately from life.

What are your thoughts on sports and the EU?

I am glad that the EU supports sports activities. Just the positive attitude of the EU towards sports means that society also looks at sports positively. Sports is no longer just a waste of time and energy but an activity that improves society, strengthens the health of athletes, and directs youth away from unwanted activities towards sports. Especially important are programs to support sports in



schools because young people need someone to encourage them and allow them to join a team where sports are practiced. Finally, sports are also a significant component of the economy and a source of entertainment for a large part of the population on Earth.

What additional thoughts or topics would you like to share that we have not touched upon yet?

I thought about why I run, even though it is clear that I will not improve anymore, quite the opposite, the farther I go, the slower it will be. Eventually, I will have to stop running because as time goes by, the body degrades, injuries or illness come. However, thankfully, this is not yet relevant for me. So why? I need running; it has become a part of my life, like eating, sleeping, reading books, listening to music. If I do not

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run for several days, I am nervous, something is missing. After appropriate training, I am happier and can comfortably engage in other activities.

Running is (in my case) probably an addiction. Just as "workaholics," smokers, gamblers, or alcohol users cannot do without their "hobbies," it seems that we runners are also addicted to running. This addiction, unlike others, has a positive impact on life, starting with better fitness, good health. And I am not talking about "a fuller wallet" because running is still an "inexpensive" sport. And lest I forget, our "Železná studnička" running collective is also motivating for me, where pleasure is combined with usefulness...

How do you view the role and significance of sports as individuals mature and enter higher age brackets?



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Sports in mature and higher age have their specifics, which stem from the permanent degradation of the body. Consequently, the body of an older athlete is not able to absorb training loads as well as a younger one. This means that the intensity and volume of training for older runners must be lower than for younger athletes.

How much lower? That depends on the specific athlete. I know cases of once excellent athletes who try to maintain (or even increase) their training loads because they have more time and high ambitions. They try to compensate for the decreased quality of their bodies with increased training loads.

However, the body is not able to absorb high training loads, leading to permanent fatigue,

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poorer race results, and injuries. In summary, it is necessary to adjust (reduce) training loads proportionally to age.

For example, running every other day helps, and one day should be reserved for rest. In older (running) age, rest is at least as important as training. The idea that the more you train, the better you will be does not apply here. Therefore, I try to find a suitable balance between qualitative and quantitative training parameters and rest; so far, I am succeeding.



PROFILE

Viliam Novák, born on 14 August 1942 in Považská Bystrica, Slovakia. Sport achievements: finisher of 119 marathons plus 7 ultramarathons. Personal best in marathon: 2:57:21 at IBUSZ Marathon Budapest in 1998. During 35 years of running, he covered over 73,413 km that is nearly twice around the Globe, in average 2100 km per year and 175 km per month. He participated in five out of six Marathon Majors - NYC Marathon 1997, Chicago La Salle Marathon 2001, Boston Marathon (five times), Real Berlin Marathon 1990, Flora London Marathon, 1999. The most iconic

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RUN AND SMILE – VILIAM NOVÁK

Life's Marathon: A Story of Sports, Science, and Endurance

were Sydney Host City Marathon, Australia, 2000 and Athens Classic Marathon 2000. Regarding to Olympic track in Sydney Viliam Novák is the fastest Slovak on this Olympic track; being the first of three Slovaks runners with his time 3:28, while the Slovak Olympian Robert Štefko was DNF (did not finish) in the Olympic race. This was given as a joke by his son Broňo, who is also a runner, but it is true!

His 64 marathons were performed abroad, in comparison to the 56 finished in Slovakia; among the most impressive were US Marine Corps Marathon in Washington D.C. 2004, 2009, Paris Marathon 2002 and Košice Peace Marathon, which he likes the best of all and he ran it already eight times. Moreover, he considers Prague Int. Marathon as a great experience as well.

Viliam Novák finished first in the age group at Moscow Int. Marathon 2012 (M70), Regensburg Marathon 2015, Budapest Marathon 2015, Lublin Marathon 2013, Ljubljana Marathon 2012, Copenhagen Marathon 2019. Among the best results in marathons, he considers the first place in Moscow, and the third place in Boston marathon 2018 (M75); notably considering that the Boston marathon is the world oldest and most iconic one.

In addition, he achieved three times the first place in the age group (2015, 2018, 2019) at the oldest European road race in Bechovice - Prague, which is organised since 1897, similarly to Boston Marathon.

Another success is the title of World Vice-Champion in mountain running 2017 and World Champion in mountain running of teams with V. Bašista 2017.

In accordance with Viliam Novák, the most important in sport, and running particularly, is its relaxation and regeneration effect leading to good health and improved ability to do our duties. Camaraderie is another significant effect of running that counts the most.

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Introduction

Today, we have the pleasure of delving into the multifaceted world of culture and sport with Jordana Palovičová, fondly referred to as Jordanka, a distinguished Slovak pianist and a prominent figure in both national and international music circles. Renowned for her musical prowess and laurels garnered from numerous competitions, Jordanka's journey into the realm of sport might seem unexpected at first glance. Yet, as we delve deeper, we uncover a fascinating intertwining of disciplines, passions, and personal histories that have shaped her perspective.



Jordanka's journey into the world of sport is not merely happenstance; it's a narrative woven intricately into the fabric of her upbringing and professional pursuits. Embracing sport as a lifestyle, she emphasizes its universal appeal, whether as a participant, spectator, or educator. But what truly captivates her is the profound connection between sport and culture, where diplomacy transcends boundaries, uniting individuals

through shared experiences.

A pivotal figure within the Slovak Olympic Academy, Jordana Palovičová serves as the Coordinator of the Working Party on Culture and Sport, a role that might raise eyebrows given her background in music. However, her journey into this domain traces back to her childhood, influenced by a mother who herself was deeply rooted in athletics. From early memories of Olympic fervour to collaborations with esteemed figures like Elena Malíková, Jordanka's immersion in the world of sport has been a natural evolution, fuelled by curiosity and a thirst for knowledge.

But what lessons does a world of sport offer to a classically trained musician? As we explore Jordanka's insights, we uncover invaluable qualities - joy of effort, solidarity, and fair play - that resonate not only in the realm of athletics but also in the pursuit of artistic excellence. Drawing



RUN AND SMILE - JORDANA PALOVIČOVÁ FORGING GLOBAL CULTURAL BONDS THROUGH SPORTS ENDEAVOURS

parallels between her roles as an associate professor and a board member of the Olympic Academy, she imparts wisdom garnered from years of nurturing young talents, emphasizing the importance of holistic development, and embracing the values epitomized by the Olympic ethos.

Jordanka's passion for languages further underscores her commitment to cultural exchange and diplomacy, transcending linguistic barriers to forge connections across borders. In a world increasingly shaped by digitalization, she advocates for a return to physical activity, urging European leaders to prioritize initiatives that promote health and social interaction, especially among the youth.

As we delve deeper into our conversation with Jordanka, we uncover not only her profound insights into sport diplomacy but also the serendipitous moments that punctuate her journey - a testament



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to the enduring power of human connection, whether through music, sport, or the shared joy of a simple phrase uttered in childhood tongue. Join us as we embark on a journey of discovery, exploring the intersections of culture, sport, and diplomacy with one of Slovakia's most eminent cultural ambassadors.

Interview

Today, as we sit down with Jordana Palovičová, we are presented with an intriguing tapestry of talents, passions, and perspectives. Welcome, Jordanka! We are eager to hear your story, which undoubtedly holds a wealth of experiences, from your illustrious career as a leading Slovak pianist to unexpected journey into the realm of sports diplomacy. We cannot wait to explore with you the challenges of culture, sport, and the unifying power of humanism.

You are known as a leading Slovak pianist, laureate of many national and international competitions. What does sport mean to you?

Sport is a lifestyle, you can join the world of sport as a professional, as an amateur, as a fan, as a teacher with the same result – being active, motivated, and happy.

Taking it from a wider perspective, what is your opinion on sport? Is there a link between culture and sport?

Definitely. From a wider perspective culture and sport are key elements of diplomacy connecting people sharing a very special experience both



physically and emotionally. From a closer perspective, there are striking parallels e. g. musicians start playing their instruments very early on, in order to succeed they have to practise regularly, they need to stay focused and disciplined (a quality I learned as a teenager 😊), they have a special regime (not always close to the outer world...).

You are Board Member of the Slovak Olympic Academy, more precisely Coordinator of the Working Party on Culture and Sport within this institution. It is a surprising position for a professional musician. How did you enter the world of sport?

My pianist-turned mother started as a basketball player and 800m runner (being called the local Wilma Rudolph). As a child I have wonderful recollections of following enthusiastically Olympic games, watching ice-skating competition or basketball matches. My mother even planned a sport career for me (being inspired by her Bulgarian roots) – a career of a rhythmic gymnast.



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RUN AND SMILE - JORDANA PALOVIČOVÁ FORGING GLOBAL CULTURAL BONDS THROUGH SPORTS ENDEAVOURS

Unfortunately, I was told I am too tall...and pursued a career in music instead 😊. I have been involved more actively in the world of sport since working with Ms Elena Malíková, the Chair of the Slovak Olympic Academy, participating in several excellent initiatives, including Erasmus+



transnational projects called “Coubertin Academy – Social Inclusion through Sport Values” or “Run – Swim – Learn! In the spirit of Coubertin”. We have met as students at the 1st Language School in Bratislava studying English and immediately

hit it off. Although coming from seemingly different worlds we have realised there are so many astonishing similarities.

Have you been involved in sport sector for a long time? How do you like a world of sports?

Being curious and studious, I enjoy the variety of world of sport, many inspiring stories behind many races and matches respectively, sport’s beneficial effect on health, as well as the socialising aspect. Moreover, André Agassi’s memoir OPEN is one of my most favourite books.

If you have to name THREE valuable qualities that sport has taught you - what are they? Why?

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In 2022, I had the rare privilege to represent the Slovak Olympic Academy at the 15th International Session for National Olympic Academies and National Olympic Committees' Delegates in Olympia in Greece. A glimpse at the stairs leading to the Pierre de Coubertin monument in Olympia sums up several valuable qualities: joy of effort, solidarity, peace, fair play, respect, friendship, excellence. We can apply them not only in the world of sport but also in the world of culture and most importantly in everyday life.

You are associate professor at the Department of Keyboard Instruments of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. What values do you teach the students you work with and are there any similarities with a field of sport how to acquire them?

In my opinion, years spent at the Academy are one of the most formative years. I work with students, fragile musicians' souls from the age of 18. To follow their transition between their 1st and last study year can be a really beautiful journey both artistically and personally. Not everyone



will necessarily become an internationally acclaimed virtuoso, but everyone can become an enthusiastic, sensitive, cultivated, well-educated and well-behaved human being. I would quote famous pianist Ferruccio Busoni: "Being a great artist primarily includes intelligence, culture, comprehensive education in music and literature and in the

matter of human existence," stressing the matter of human existence. And how to acquire these values? Just take a look at the Olympic values 😊.

There is a significant importance of foreign languages in a development of diplomacy as such. Could you tell us how many languages do you speak and what is your view on this topic?

I love learning new languages as well as speaking them and meeting people from all over the world. It is one of the best means to broaden one's mind, make new friends, stimulate one's brain and



become an open-minded human being 😊. Personally, I try to encourage my students to attend a language school as I think it is much more difficult to find a proper time later in life and the younger you start, the easier it gets to learn new words. I must confess, I have met many students from my field who do not have a good knowledge of foreign languages

compared e. g. to their non-field age peers. As for your second question, I speak English, German, French, a little bit Spanish, Russian and Bulgarian (and of course, being born and raised in former Czechoslovakia, I can speak Czech too 😊).

Is it common also for the other people from a cultural environment to speak so many foreign languages?

On the one hand, they say that music is a universal language. On the other hand, travelling as a musician, working often with colleagues from abroad inspires one to learn foreign languages. I'd say, nowadays English is the most spoken language among members of my community, but musicians also need German (as many fantastic books on music are written in German), Italian



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(especially singers and collaborative pianists; French or Russian, at least basics, can be also very helpful for them when working on opera arias and so-called lied repertoire by an wide array of world composers).

Do you have any sports challenges nowadays?

Walking.

Finally, in order to conclude our interview, what is your opinion on the recent European Union sport agenda? What more does the European Union need to do to encourage more young people to embrace sport as a way of life?

European Union should encourage young people to reduce the time spent on social media, at the computer, mobile phones and promote healthy lifestyle indoor and outdoor based on positive effects of socialising (especially after the bleak time of social distancing due to corona). The upcoming era of intense digitalisation could be very tricky, luring people spending more and more time in virtual reality, lacking physical activities, losing their jobs, and becoming more and more depressed, staying isolated, not interacting with other people... The European officials need to step in and motivate people to stay positive and grounded through sport activities.

Is there something you would like to tell us on sport diplomacy and we did not ask you?

Sport diplomacy can bring together individuals from all over the world sharing their specific culture and habits. Some of these encounters can blossom into wonderful friendships worth cultivating and lasting a life-time... Some sport diplomacy-orientated projects can bring about even amusing situations. While in Bulgaria, homeland of my grandparents, I was spontaneously invited to well-known Varna based Radio Darik. The main topic ought to be our very dear project “EU Sport Values Diplomacy”, headed by Kristina Kazandzhieva, Yanka Dimitrova and Elena Malíková. Suddenly, at the very end of our interview I was asked to communicate in Bulgarian, a language I have spoken mainly as a child, and reveal some of the words I remember. My spontaneous reply: “Stork is in the water,” accompanied by some basic introduction sentences 😊 . I hope stork will make it one day to the Bulgarian Olympic Games 😊 .

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RUN AND SMILE - JORDANA PALOVIČOVÁ FORGING GLOBAL CULTURAL BONDS THROUGH SPORTS ENDEAVOURS

PROFILE:

Jordana Palovičová has studied piano at the Conservatory in Bratislava, the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, the Royal College of Music in London and the Musikhochschule Lübeck. She holds the position of Associate Professor at the Department of Keyboard Instruments of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. She has won awards, as both a soloist and an accompanist, in a number of national and international competitions such as Slovak Conservatories Competition, Virtuosi per musica di pianoforte, Johann Nepomuk Hummel International Piano Competition, Concertino Praga International Radio Competition, Talent of the Year, Chappell Gold Medal Competition.

In 2016 she received the Ján Cikker Prize for active promotion of composer's work. Her recordings have appeared on MUSICA, Music Fund, Pavlík Records, REAL MUSIC HOUSE, Academy of Performing Arts labels, Slávik Slovenska, Konvergencie, Slovak Radio & Television, Czech Radio & Television, Norddeutscher Rundfunk.

Jordana Palovičová has also performed extensively as a soloist and a sought-after chamber music player in a number of major Slovak and international music festivals e. g. Bratislava Music Festival, Melos-Ethos, New Slovak Music, Music Spring in Košice, Festival of Nice Music, Convergences, Indian Summer in Levoča, Viva Musica!, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Music Days, Harmonie Starego Miasta Lublin, Duettissimo!, Cambra de Música, Cheltenham International Festival of Music, Sibelius Week, ARMONIE DELLA SERA.

She has collaborated with a wide range of artists and chamber music ensembles respectively and performed as a soloist with a number of leading Slovak and international orchestras, including Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Cappella Istropolitana, Slovak Sinfonietta Žilina, State Philharmonic Orchestra Košice, VŠMU Modern Orchestra, Moravian Philharmonics Olomouc, Prague Philharmonia, Lambeth Orchestra, RCM Sinfonietta Orchestra and Lübecker Philharmoniker.

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Introduction

In the world of sports, the role of a coach is often revered for its impact on athlete development, strategy, and team dynamics. We had the privilege to sit down with Dušan Poláček from Slovakia, successful coach of modern pentathlon with years of experience across various sports disciplines.

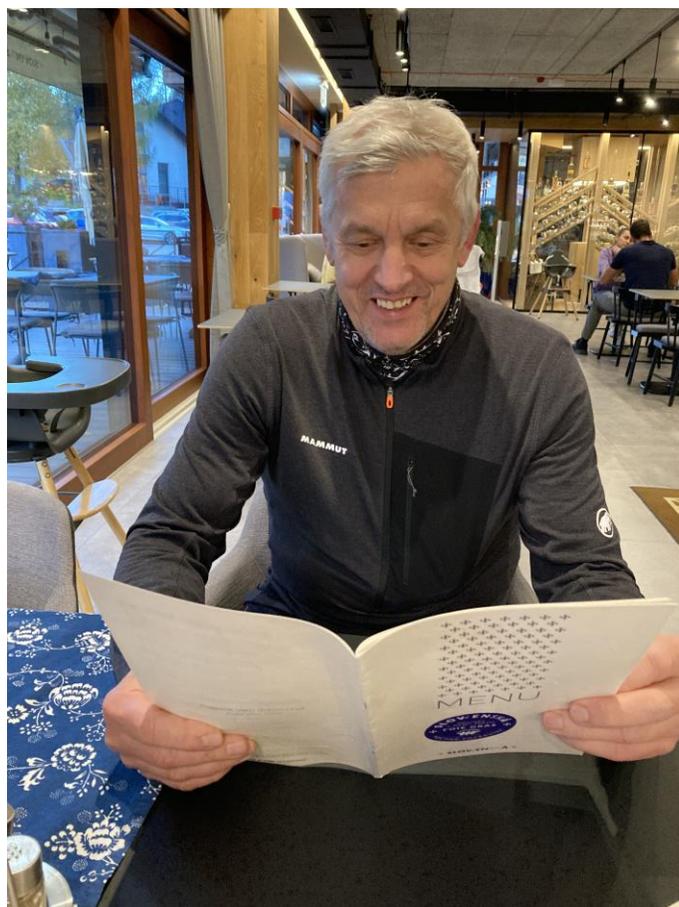
Currently working as the general secretary of the Slovak Modern Pentathlon Association. Former successful athlete, respected coach, international referee, sports expert, and official. Here are the insights gathered from our interview, offering a unique glimpse into the world of coaching.



Interview

Duško, good afternoon and welcome. We are glad that you could make time for us! In this interview, we would like to primarily delve into your sports career, the outstanding achievements you have attained as both an athlete and a coach, as well as your views on sports values and the essence of sports itself.

1. Let's start with the first interview question - how would you describe your perspective on your sports career?



In reflecting on my sports career, I perceive it through three distinct time dimensions. Firstly, during my youth as an active athlete, my focus was primarily on the satisfaction derived from self-realization, visibility, and other features that young individuals typically strive for. I believe these features are crucial during this developmental stage as they contribute to shaping one's identity.

Secondly, during what is commonly referred to as middle age, when I transitioned into coaching, my involvement in sports became a blend of passion, personal fulfilment, and the satisfaction of achieving the goals I had set for myself.

Finally, at present, my sports career evokes a sense of contentment, knowing that I have realized the aspirations I once

envisioned. This fulfilment allows me to shift my focus to pursuits that were previously side-lined due to my involvement in sports.

2. Among your sports accomplishments, which one holds the most significance to you, and what makes it particularly meaningful?

I evaluate the outcomes of my endeavours, spanning from my time as an athlete to later roles as a coach, by considering whether I reached or at least approached my full potential. This assessment encompasses both general achievements and successes in major sports competitions that culminated in medal performances. Reflecting on my journey, I firmly believe that I have approached my maximum capabilities in both capacities. As a result, I find contentment and



fulfilment in what I have accomplished, without any exceptions or specific preferences.

3. As a coach, you have had a significant impact on multiple generations of athletes. Is there a particular period in your coaching career that holds a special place in your memories?

Each and every generation of athletes that "passed through my hands" was different, specific, possessing its own unique qualities and characteristics. This presented a continual challenge for me, as I endeavoured to unlock each individual's maximum potential in alignment with my coaching philosophy. It was always a challenge for me trying to get the maximum potential out of the athlete based on their abilities, or at least get close to them, and such a work always fulfilled me completely. In this way, each generation

has been an immensely rewarding experience. I deeply hope that my coaching career contributed to personal growth and development of athletes I used to work with.

4. From your perspective, what defines the essence of inclusion in sports?



I think I have already indicated many things in the previous answers and articulated a compelling point. Indeed, sports uniquely offer opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances or disadvantages. Sport is a space that gives and creates opportunities for everyone, without exception, even in the case of various disadvantages. It allows people to meet in a common space, as equals, on the same starting line. It serves as a platform where people from diverse backgrounds can come together on equal footing, sharing a common space. This inclusivity is unparalleled, providing a space where everyone can participate and thrive, regardless of differences. In a world where such inclusive spaces are often rare, sports stand out as a beacon of unity and equality. Where else can you find such a space for inclusion?

5. What sports values resonate with you the most? In what ways had sports the greatest impact on you?

Engaging in sports demands a profound respect for it as a phenomenon governed by rules, regularities, emotions, and values. In my opinion, you cannot truly practice sports without acknowledging and honouring all these elements.

Whether consciously recognized or not, sports exert a profound influence that extends far beyond the playing field, shaping individuals throughout their lives. This transformative power of sports is often overlooked in contemporary society, yet its impact is immeasurable. Sports have the ability to transform individuals, contributing to their personal growth and development in profound ways. It is an invaluable quality of sports that many fail to realize, particularly in today's so-called "developed society." This transformative effect is profound, enriching lives in ways that surpass



mere physical activity. Sport has a power to change individuals, forming them into better Persons. Yes, the Persons with a capital 'P'! Sport has a power to make individuals better in all aspects of their lives.

6. Do you have any future plans involving sports? How do you envision the role of sports in your life after you retire from competitions and active coaching?

It is likely that I will never fully part ways with sports, even as this chapter of my life gradually draws to a close. As I have previously expressed, when you have a deep love for sports, it becomes ingrained in your being for life. It permeates your thoughts, actions, and mind-set, leaving an indelible mark on your identity.

7. Aside from actively participating in sports, what other

benefits or experiences have you gained from your involvement in sports?

Sports have given me more than just the physical act of participation. Beyond the active practice, it has provided me with a profound sense of fulfilment. Knowing that I have chosen sports to be an integral part of my life brings me immense contentment.



PROFILE

Dušan Poláček is a successful coach in modern pentathlon, who had a significant impact on multiple generations of athletes and was behind great achievements of Czechoslovak and later Slovak modern pentathlon, including Olympic Games.

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A former high-level modern pentathlete, represented Czechoslovakia at numerous major sport events, such as World Championships and European Championships. Olympian, being a member of the national team of Czechoslovakia at the Olympic Games in Moscow 1980. A multiple national champion in modern pentathlon, winner of various national and international trophies. A former Slovak Universidad record holder in swimming, he has achieved several significant sporting results in shooting as well.

Education background: Graduated the Comenius University in Bratislava with specialization on



coaching and physical education (1981). Numerous life-long learning activities within modern pentathlon, swimming, fencing, shooting, horse-back riding, and athletics. Certified international referee within the International Modern Pentathlon Union (UIPM).

Work experience: Professionally works as Secretary General of the Slovak Modern Pentathlon Association in Bratislava, Slovakia. During his fruitful professional career as a coach from 1982 till 2017 achieved with his athletes many significant results at major sports event for Czechoslovakia, later Slovakia, including medals from the World Championships and European Championships.

Long-term specialist and lecturer at master's degree programme in modern pentathlon at the Charles

University, Prague, Czech Republic. Tutor within dual careers of athletes and support of postgraduate studies of the Slovak and Czech modern pentathletes.

Professional experience: Responsible for many national initiatives linked to sport and physical education, notably in modern pentathlon, swimming, fencing, shooting, horse-back riding, and athletics. In charge of training of coaches in Brazil within the International Modern Pentathlon Union (UIPM) in 1988 upon appointment by the President of the International Modern Pentathlon Union (UIPM). Based in Prague, he was in charge of preparation of national physical education



curriculum in the field of sport in former Czechoslovakia. Currently is a Chairman of Sport Club VEGA, Slovakia.

Interests: Cycling, fishing, trekking, nature, photography, history. Active contributor to Pentathlon News, a national modern pentathlon journal of the Slovak Modern Pentathlon Association. Being responsible for nation-wide policy development in modern pentathlon, he was invited to numerous international conferences abroad.

Foreign languages: English, German, Russian



Introduction

In today's fast-paced world of sports, the principles of sustainability and inclusivity stand as guiding lights, illuminating a path toward a brighter, more equitable future. At the forefront of this movement stands Tomáš Poláček, a Legal Counsel at HB Reavis and the esteemed Chair of SK Mladost'. With a blend of legal acumen and a fervent dedication to green initiatives, Tomáš is leading the charge in effecting positive change within the sporting arena.

In his role as a driving force behind the "Inclusion First" project, Tomáš champions the cause of accessibility, ensuring that sports transcend barriers and embrace individuals from all walks of life.



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RUN AND SMILE - TOMÁŠ POLÁČEK DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE: SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICS, INCLUSION AND FUTURE OF SPORT

However, his vision extends beyond mere inclusivity; he intertwines sustainability into the very fabric of the project's operations. From eco-friendly transportation to the utilization of ethically sourced materials, every decision reflects Tomáš's unwavering commitment to nurturing a greener, more sustainable sporting landscape.

Join us as we embark on a journey through Tomáš's inspiring endeavours, delving into his profound dedication to sustainability, his innovative approaches to fostering inclusivity, and the pivotal role of sports in shaping a future that is both equitable and environmentally conscious.

Interview

Welcome to our interview, Tomáš. It is a pleasure to have you on the premises of ŠK Mladost', where the echoes of sportsmanship and inclusivity resound through the corridors. Your presence here is particularly esteemed, given your distinguished expertise in both legal matters and sustainability within the realm of sports.

As we delve into the intricacies of your journey, it is truly fascinating to uncover the layers of your multifaceted role within SK Mladost'. Your leadership and commitment to fostering a more inclusive sporting environment through initiatives like the 'Inclusion First' project are commendable. It is evident that you not only bring legal prowess but also a deep-seated passion for sustainable practices to the table, propelling positive change within the sporting community. Let us dive straight into the heart of our discussion, focusing on the core topics that drive our conversation today.

1. Tomáš, could you elaborate on how sustainability and green initiatives are integrated into the operational field of the project?

Absolutely. Sustainability and the green dimension are integral parts of every aspect of the "Inclusion First" project. From the planning stages to the execution of activities, we prioritize eco-friendliness and strive to minimize our environmental impact. For instance, during the transnational project meetings, we provided local transportation using electric vehicles, reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable mobility.

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In addition, we were committed to utilizing exclusively eco-textiles and adhering to a fair-trade approach for all gadgets and eco-administrative materials used throughout the project. By choosing environmentally friendly materials and supporting fair-trade practices, we not only reduced our ecological footprint but also contributed to ethical and sustainable supply chains.

Furthermore, we have made a deliberate decision to organize transnational project meetings



primarily in outdoor environments. This approach served multiple purposes.

Firstly, it helped to reduce electricity consumption and carbon footprint associated with indoor venues. Secondly, it provided participants with an opportunity for active engagement, including physical activities in the fresh air, promoting well-being and connection with nature.

Moreover, conducting outdoor project activities mitigated the risk of virus infections, which was particularly crucial considering the ongoing challenges posed by pandemics. By prioritizing outdoor settings and adhering to relevant health restrictions, we aimed to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants while maintaining the momentum of our project activities.

2. **It is impressive to see such comprehensive efforts to integrate sustainability into every aspect of the project. How do you foresee these green initiatives contributing to the overall success of "Inclusion First"?**

The incorporation of green initiatives into the "Inclusion First" project aligns with our overarching goal of promoting inclusivity, diversity, and social cohesion through sports. By prioritizing sustainability and eco-friendliness, we not only minimize our environmental impact but also set a positive example for other projects and organizations to follow. These green initiatives demonstrate our commitment to responsible and ethical practices, enhancing our credibility and reputation within the community.

Moreover, by organizing outdoor project activities and utilizing eco-friendly materials, we create a more engaging and immersive experience for participants, fostering a deeper connection with the project's objectives and values. This holistic approach to sustainability not only benefits the environment but also enhances the overall effectiveness and impact of our project activities.

In essence, sustainability is not just a standalone aspect of the "Inclusion First" project; it is woven into the fabric of every initiative and decision we make. By embracing



sustainability as a core principle, we are laying the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable, and environmentally conscious future.

3. **Tomáš, beyond the environmental aspects, your involvement in sports extends to promoting values, ethics, and inclusion. Can you elaborate on how sports can instil important values in individuals and communities?**

Absolutely. Sports have the remarkable ability to foster values such as teamwork, discipline, perseverance, and respect. Through participation in sports, individuals learn the importance of cooperation, goal-setting, and resilience, which are invaluable skills both on and off the field.

Moreover, sports can promote inclusivity and diversity by bringing people from different backgrounds together, fostering understanding and empathy. Overall, sports serve as a powerful platform for promoting positive values and shaping ethical behaviour.

4. **Ethics in sports is a topic of increasing importance. How do you approach ethical considerations within the realm of sports, particularly in your role as the Chair of SK Mladost'?**

Ethics in sports is indeed a critical issue, and it is something we take very seriously at SK Mladost'. As the Chair, I am committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and sportsmanship in all our activities. This includes promoting transparency, accountability, and respect for the rules and regulations governing sports.

Additionally, we strive to create a culture of ethical conduct among our members, emphasizing the importance of honesty, integrity, and respect for opponents. By prioritizing ethics in sports, we not only uphold the integrity of the game but also contribute to the positive development of individuals and communities.

5. **Inclusion is a central theme in your work, particularly through initiatives like the "Inclusion First" project. How do you ensure that sports are accessible and welcoming to all members of society?**

Inclusion is indeed a cornerstone of our work at SK Mladost' and the "Inclusion First" project. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in sports regardless of their background, abilities, or circumstances. To ensure inclusivity, we actively engage with marginalized communities, provide resources and support for individuals with disabilities, and create accessible pathways for participation. Additionally, we prioritize diversity in our



programming, promoting representation and inclusion of individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. By fostering an inclusive environment, we not only enrich the sporting experience for all participants but also promote social cohesion and unity.

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6. With your expertise in both law and sports, how do you see the relationship between sports and the European Union evolving in the future?

The relationship between sports and the European Union is complex and multifaceted, encompassing various aspects such as policy development, funding, and regulation. I believe that the EU will continue to play a significant role in shaping the future of sports through initiatives that promote inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation.

This includes supporting grassroots sports programs, investing in infrastructure development, and addressing issues such as doping, match fixing, and discrimination. Additionally, the EU has a role to play in promoting good governance and transparency in sports organizations, ensuring accountability and integrity in the administration of sports. Overall, I see the EU as a key partner in advancing the values and principles of sports in Europe and beyond.



7. Looking ahead, what do you envision for the future of sports, particularly in terms of sustainability, inclusion, and innovation?

The future of sports holds immense potential for positive change, particularly in terms of sustainability, inclusion, and innovation. I envision a future where sports are not only a source of entertainment and competition but also a catalyst for social change and environmental stewardship. This includes leveraging technology and data analytics to enhance performance, improve athlete safety, and promote fair play.

Moreover, I see a growing emphasis on sustainability in sports, with organizations prioritizing eco-friendly practices, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting environmental conservation. Additionally, I believe that sports will continue to serve as a powerful tool for promoting inclusion and diversity, breaking down barriers, and fostering social cohesion. Overall, I am





RUN AND SMILE - TOMÁŠ POLÁČEK DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE: SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICS, INCLUSION AND FUTURE OF SPORT

optimistic about the future of sports and the positive impact it can have on individuals, communities, and the planet.

- 8. Thank you, Tomáš, for sharing how sustainability and green initiatives are integrated into the "Inclusion First" project. Your commitment to promoting inclusivity and environmental stewardship is truly inspiring.**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important aspects of our project. I am excited to continue our efforts to make a positive impact in both social and environmental spheres.

PROFILE

Tomáš Poláček epitomizes the synergy of law, sports, and sustainability, carving a trail of innovation and impact within Slovakia's dynamic sports landscape. As a Project Manager and leading figure within the "Inclusion First" project, co-funded by the European Union, Tomáš spearheads transformative initiatives across all Work Packages. His visionary leadership is further accentuated by his pivotal role as Chairman of ŠK Mladost', where he champions inclusivity and sportsmanship, fostering a culture of community and camaraderie.

In the legal arena, Tomáš is a steadfast advocate for integrity and excellence as a Legal Counsel at HB Reavis. With a profound understanding of M&A, Legal Compliance, and Corporate Law, he navigates complex legal terrain with finesse, ensuring compliance and ethical practice at every juncture. Tomáš's academic odyssey, characterized by the pursuit of a Master's degree and subsequent attainment of a Doctorate in Law from Comenius University in Bratislava, underscores his unwavering commitment to academic rigor and intellectual pursuit.

Beyond the confines of boardrooms and courtrooms, Tomáš's engagement transcends personal gratification, as he actively enriches the legal community as an external lecturer at Jagellonian University, Poland. A true aficionado, Tomáš finds solace and passion in the realm of sports, where his pursuits in swimming, running, shooting, and golf not only attest to his dedication to physical well-being but also epitomize his profound reverence for the sporting ethos. Here, he imparts

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invaluable insights and wisdom to the next generation of legal professionals, nurturing a legacy of knowledge and mentorship.

With an unwavering commitment to innovation, integrity, and sustainability, Tomáš Poláček emerges as a transformative figure in Slovakia's legal and sporting arenas. His tireless efforts and visionary leadership serve as catalysts for positive change, leaving an indelible mark on the fabric of society and inspiring generations to come.



Introduction

Greetings, esteemed readers. Today, we are honoured to host Vladimír Uhrín in our interview series. With a distinguished background in financial management spanning various industries, Vladimír brings a profound understanding of both business intricacies and the world of sports.



His journey, from representing the Slovak Baseball National Team to conquering Half Ironman races, epitomizes a commitment to excellence and personal development.

Join us as we engage with Vladimír, exploring his insights on the symbiosis between business acumen and athletic prowess, his educational journey, and the core values that define his professional and sporting endeavors.

Interview

Hello, Vlado! Welcome to our project team. We are thrilled to have you join us for this interview for our publication titled "Run and Smile."

While we have known each other for years through our shared passion for running in Železná studnička, we are excited to delve into various aspects

of your life and experiences, starting with your professional journey.

1. Where do you work, and what are your professional challenges?

I am working as a Financial Manager for Mondelez, covering the European region with headquarters in Zurich, focused mainly on the financial planning activities. The multicultural environment and the opportunity to collaborate with smart and talented individuals is incredibly enriching.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work dynamics has been significant, and it has influenced the workplace dynamics also within our company. The breaking down of barriers between various levels of seniority was a notable shift, allowing for more collaboration and interaction across different organizational levels. This change fostered a more inclusive and collaborative work culture.



While the pandemic disrupted many in-person activities, including sports and networking events, it is impressive to see how online opportunities within the company have replaced some of these

activities. The ability to adapt to change, both in my professional role and personal activities, demonstrates resilience and flexibility. Online platforms have become essential for maintaining connections and facilitating work interactions during these challenging times.

I started my career within a company dealing with broadcasting services, satellite pay TV, and digital infrastructure within the Slovak Republic. It was a monopoly company, which often operate in tightly regulated environments, requiring a deep understanding of compliance and industry standards. The cross-functional collaboration broadened my understanding of how various departments and sectors contribute to the overall success of the company.

Participating in the expansion of Pay TV services to different markets was an opportunity to improve the project management across borders that involves navigating diverse regulatory landscapes, cultural considerations, and market dynamics. Regularly joining Board meetings and bankers was a testament to my strategic involvement and the recognition of expertise, which gave a strong background for further carrier opportunities in Transportation and Logistics company when I spent couple of years again in business and finance environment, which means strategic financial planning and business valuation.

2. Could you also elaborate on your educational background, please?

I graduated at the University of Economics in Bratislava, achieved master's degree in Finance, Banking, and Investments. The diploma thesis "The financial aspects of nuclear energy in Slovakia within the European Union" helped me to explore the intersection of finance and nuclear energy and to understand a complex and crucial aspect of national and global concerns.

The fact that I spent considerable time with Jozef Zlatňanský, a distinguished gentleman and professional working at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, was remarkable. The IAEA, being an organization under the United Nations, plays a critical role in promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy while ensuring safety and security. Being able to see



and interact with professionals and experts from various countries within a global organization like the IAEA, was a powerful and enriching experience with unique cultural and professional exposure.

It is not a surprise, that my interest in nuclear energy, focused on National Safety and Security, with a sustainable aspects, directed me to get to know the basics of research and

development to know more about WANO, IEA or State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom (ROSATOM), so my next steps headed to Eastern countries, where I spent several months in Russia attending language schools in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, which was an incredible and enriching experience.

I had an opportunity to enjoy Russian culture first-hand that goes beyond language learning and interact with people from various parts of the world, representing different cultures such as Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Europe or USA. The memories and insights gained during this period contribute to a broader worldview and will stay with me throughout my life.

3. Vlado and sports – how would you characterize yourself from this perspective?



My sport journey started from sprinting as a child to later joining a baseball club. Baseball is indeed a dynamic and strategic sport that requires a combination of skills, including sprinting, batting, and precise ball throwing. Maybe, it seems boring to some viewers but the need for accuracy, quick reaction time, and continuous engagement without

much downtime makes it a challenging and exciting collective sport that I really loved mainly the strategic element of baseball, with athletes communicating through secret signals.

Being a part of the Slovak National baseball team gave me an opportunity to participate in various competitions. I will remember forever the one in the Netherland where I achieved the best statistical rating among the 300 competing players from Europe. Sport is a substantial part of my life,

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particularly baseball, has been a significant and rewarding part of my life, contributing not only to my physical fitness but also to the development of teamwork, strategic thinking, and quick decision-making.

During my studies at the University, I spent couple of years playing indoor football with friends also from different countries, like Algeria or Tunis.

My active participation and success in company games and challenges, especially in winning the step challenges with over 5000 participants from different countries, showcase not only my personal commitment to a healthy lifestyle but also my ability to motivate and lead a team towards achieving goals as I was nominated as a captain of team who won the competition. I influenced my team members to improve their sport capability and inspired them to join the swimming lessons with professional coach.

Individual winners... get inspired!
60% individuals averaged above 10,000 steps



Personal BEST >30,000 steps

1	Vladimir Uhrin	Slovakia	98,553
2	Brano Urbanik	UK	60,492
3	Natalia Rezenenko	Slovakia	56,670
4	Angela, Ondo	Hungary	50,178
5	Martin Konkell	Sweden	48,952
6	Martin Hvizdos	Slovakia	46,949
7	Melinda, Keller	Hungary	46,800
8	Agnieszka Kolakowska	Poland	45,000
9	Ewald Gardewin	Germany	42,270
10	Michaela Lane-Robinson	Slovakia	41,147
11	Sarah Cunningham	Sweden	41,036

Most consistent hard steppers – 6wk ave

1	Vladimir Uhrin	Slovakia
2	Brano Urbanik	UK
3	Christian van Mark	Germany
4	Kristina Gelleova	Slovakia
5	Erika Cermakova	Slovakia
6	Lubos Janacek	Slovakia
7	Andrea Gondova	Slovakia
8	Javier Sagullio-Fernandez	Sweden
9	Michaela Lane-Robinson	Slovakia

4. Have you participated in, or are you planning to participate in any sports competitions? Do you have any specific sports challenges?

In recent years, I participated in triathlon competitions, including completing the demanding “Oravaman”- the Half Ironman with a significant 3000m elevation in the mountains of Slovakia. I



completed the Half Ironman in Budapest and in Prague. Obviously, there were a lot more sport competitions, which prepared me for the more recognized ones.



As a preparation for the race, I committed to improve my swimming skills by training with one of the best coaches in our country, whose students have reached World Championships and the Olympic Games. Training alongside swimmers who served as inspiration for eight years underscores the long-term dedication and discipline required in competitive swimming.

What is beautiful and inspiring is that you can go to the race all by yourself and you will always meet new people and it is not a coincidence, that many times these people will become friends for life.

What I would like to emphasize, that people who are involved in sports are mostly very friendly and warm. It does not matter what country a person comes from, it does not matter what their native language or religion is, you understand each other with a smile on your face.

I have one very nice example, during the Ironman competition in Budapest, where I met a group of women sitting at breakfast, speaking in English, already dressed for the race, so we started

talking to know more each other. To be honest, the lady was not the lightest athlete and I wondered if she was really going to compete, but I put my prejudices aside and we got to know each other.

After a while we were enjoying our breakfast with a smile. The lady came from California to see her parents, she flew half of the World, just for this competition, to hug her mom from Slovakia



and prove to herself that the impossible just doesnot exist.

This woman completed the Half Ironman, albeit as the last one, but with the biggest applause with a champagne and congratulations from the entire Ironman organizational team, as well as from the race organizer himself. When I think back about it, it was the perfect example, how we can break social barriers through sport. It is exactly about that moment, about sports diplomacy, about overcoming barriers and making the world and people happier and healthier.

5. We have selected you for our publication as the face of the BUSINESS area. How do you perceive the connection between these two worlds?

Acknowledging that both sports and business come with their share of ups and downs underscores the importance of resilience. From my perspective the importance of perseverance and determination are required to achieve goals. Whether in sports or business, staying committed to the journey and pushing through obstacles is essential. Each day is an opportunity to move closer to goals and consistent, small steps can lead to significant progress over time. It is important to stay committed to aspirations and the long-term vision and the dedication needed to reach desired outcomes. Consistent effort and dedication are key elements in both sports and business endeavours.

Triathlon is such a demanding and rewarding sport, and it is amazing how the lessons learned from pushing my limits in triathlon can extend to all aspects of life. The mindset of not giving up and believing that anything is possible help me overcome obstacles, achieve my goals, and continuously strive for improvement in all areas of my life.



The perseverance and determination required to complete a triathlon, especially when faced with physical and mental challenges along the way, are invaluable qualities that greatly benefit me in my personal and professional life.

Triathlon teaches you to embrace discomfort, adapt to adversity, and keep moving forward, which are all essential skills for success in any endeavor.

While advertising and brand promotion are important for visibility and attracting customers, they are only part of the equation. Just like giving a product a new look or upgrading equipment in sports, sometimes what is truly needed is a substantive improvement in the product itself or dedicated effort and practice to enhance performance.

In product development, it is crucial to not only focus on marketing but also on continuously refining the product to meet the evolving needs and desires of users. Similarly, in sports, while having top-notch gear is nice, it is ultimately the dedication to training and improvement that leads to real progress in performance.

This mindset shift, from simply dressing up products or relying on external factors in sports, to actively improving their core aspects, is what can truly drive long-term success and satisfaction for users and athletes alike.

Another aspect that sport has for a person is to be fit, healthy in a good condition.

Little is said about it, but there is a higher risk of cardiovascular mortality than cancer mortality. Junk food, sweetened drinks, Snacks blinking on us on every corner, full of sugar and carbohydrates, is literally killing people.

We see a high impact of overweight people and obesity on cardiovascular health, as well as its effects on social interactions and self-esteem, especially among young people. Overweight and



obesity pose significant health risks, including cardiovascular problems, and may also lead to feelings of isolation, low self-confidence, and social stigma.



Engaging in sports and physical activity play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Sport not only promotes physical fitness and helps manage weight but also fosters social connections, teamwork, and a sense of belonging. Participating in sports can provide opportunities for individuals of all shapes and sizes to come together, build relationships, and support one another in achieving common goals.

Moreover, sports have the power to break down barriers and challenge societal norms and stereotypes. By promoting inclusivity, acceptance, and diversity, sports can create a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to pursue their passions and overcome obstacles, including those related to weight or body image.

6. In your opinion, where does inclusion through sports lie?

Inclusion through sports is a platform where people of all abilities, backgrounds, and identities can come together to engage in physical activity regardless of any barriers or limitations they may face. Everyone, regardless of age, gender, race, ability, or socioeconomic status, has the opportunity to participate and enjoy the benefits of being active.

Sport boosts self-confidence improves physical health and mental well-being. Sport creates also opportunities for a social interaction, collaboration, and teamwork, helping to bridge divides and promote inclusion.

If we limit sport to simple jogging or running, there is nothing better, than if you have a chance to



have a conversation during the sport activity, to know each other better, it is a perfect moment to share thoughts and ideas, to learn and grow, which in the end will conclude with the social and emotional rewards. It is also about the creation of a welcoming and inclusive environment where people of all backgrounds and abilities can come together and enjoy sport with the Smile.

7. Which sports values are close to you? How has sports influenced you the most?

Fair competition is the number one. It is essential not just in sports like triathlon but also in various aspects of life, including business and finance. In sports, rules and regulations are in place to ensure that competition is fair and that all athletes have an equal opportunity to succeed based on their own abilities and efforts.

In triathlon, drafting behind another cyclist to gain an unfair advantage is against the rules and can result in penalties. This rule helps maintain fairness and integrity in the competition by ensuring that each athlete is responsible for their own performance and is not unduly benefiting from the efforts of others.

Similarly, in the realm of finance and investment, adhering to standards like the Global Investment Performance Standards (GIPS) helps ensure fair and transparent reporting of investment

performance. By following these standards, investment firms provide accurate and consistent information to investors, promoting trust and confidence in the market.

The other important value is Respect for oneself, teammates, opponents, coaches, officials, and the rules of the game. It promotes fair play and positive relationships both on and off the field. The Respect is closely linked to ethical conduct in business. Treating others with respect involves acting with honesty, integrity, and fairness in all business dealings.



PROFILE

Vladimír Uhrín's career trajectory is impressive and diverse, showcasing his expertise in financial management across multiple industries. His experience in sectors ranging from healthcare services, digital broadcasting services to transportation and logistics services and FMCG demonstrates his adaptability and ability to excel in dynamic environments.



His multilingual proficiency in English, Russian, and German opens doors for effective communication and collaboration in international settings, reflecting his global mindset and cross-cultural competence.

Beyond his professional achievements, Vladimír's passion for sports, particularly triathlon, underscores his commitment to personal development, physical fitness, and mental resilience.

His involvement in the Slovak Baseball National Team, indoor football, and yachting further highlights his diverse interests and adventurous spirit.

The pursuit of new challenges such as freediving showcases his willingness to push boundaries and embrace new experiences, reflecting a lifelong dedication to growth and exploration.

Overall, Vladimír Uhrín's combination of professional expertise, linguistic abilities, and passion for sports and adventure makes him a well-rounded and dynamic individual.



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Introduction

In the world where the digitalization of sports meets captivating graphic design, Julian Vojtech stands as a luminary figure. Originating from Slovakia, Julian is renowned for his expertise in harnessing digital technologies to enhance sporting experiences and his skill in crafting visually stunning graphics that leave a lasting impression.

With a career spanning over two decades, Julian has been a driving force behind numerous remarkable sports events, both at governmental and non-governmental levels. His dedication to



advancing the intersection of sports and technology has earned him widespread recognition as a reliable and competent partner in the digital realm.

Moreover, his creative genius shines through in his exquisite graphic designs, adding a touch of aesthetic brilliance to every project he undertakes.

Today, we have the privilege of delving into Julian's multifaceted journey, gaining insights into his personal connection to sports, his thoughts on the evolving landscape of digital technologies in sports, and the profound impact of physical activities on both his professional and personal life.

Join us as we uncover the fascinating story of Julian Vojtech, a visionary at the forefront of innovation in the world of sports and design.

Interview

Hello Julo, it is my great pleasure to conduct this interview with you. We have known each other for a very long time, and I am very grateful to you for supporting numerous amazing sports events over the past 20 years, whether organized at governmental or non-governmental levels. It has always been a pleasure to collaborate with you. We all know you as a very reliable and competent partner in the field of digital technologies and also as a creator of beautiful graphic designs. However, this time we would like to get to know you from a more personal perspective, especially in connection with your activities in sports and promoting physical activities. For this reason, I would like to start our interview by looking behind the scenes of your sports performances, results, and goals.

1. What does sport mean in your life? What does sport represent for you?

Sport, for me, is primarily an irreplaceable source of daily movement, through which I balance the mental aspect of my work. However, I perceive it as entertainment, which has brought me pleasure, joy, relaxation, inspiration, and later also stress relief since childhood. It can be said that sport has also changed my view of the world. Another dimension of sport is its impact on personality. Looking back, I realize that sport has always shaped me mentally and personally. Victories, failures, humility, disappointment, recognition, challenges, patience, emotions... and much more, including sporting ideals, have been transferred from sport to everyday life, thereby influencing my overall personality.

2. From a broader perspective, what is your opinion on sport itself? Is there any connection between sport and digital technologies?

From my point of view, the connection between sport and digital technologies is very close, and it always has been. Sport is a phenomenon into which there has always been an effort to implement new things. And so it is with digital technologies. Although the extent to which technology should interfere with sport itself is always questionable, overall, I believe it pushes it forward, enhances it, brings attractiveness, thereby opening up completely new possibilities.

3. Could you tell us how you got involved in professional sports in your work? How did you enter the world of sports?

2

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As I mentioned, sport has been a part of my life practically all my life. From a young age, I was involved in competitive table tennis and later in football, both as an active player and in club management. However, all of this was only at the regional level, and I came into direct contact with professional sports in my very first job after studies. Perhaps subconsciously, I was drawn to these spheres, and when I saw an advertisement seeking an information analyst for the National Sports Centre, I knew this was exactly for me... And it was 😊

4. Does sport still have an influence and impact on your work?

Certainly yes. As I have outlined several times, I practically live with sport constantly. However, in recent times (perhaps directly proportional to increasing age 😊), I increasingly realize the importance of physical activity - ergo movement is life. Feeling healthier, having more energy, being in mental and physical



harmony, I perceive all of this as benefits derived from sport. Through this somewhat longer introduction, I finally come to answer your question: well, the impact of sport on my work is indeed significant. For my work, I need to constantly draw inspiration, ideas, and stimuli, and I have found that it is much easier when sport is part of my lifestyle.

5. How do you like the world of sports?

The world of sports has fascinated me since the moments when I can't even remember... 😊 Many of my initial memories are associated with watching the Olympics or other sports broadcasts, where I always found my role models and idols. I mentioned my childhood sports activities in the previous question, and they gradually transferred into adulthood - in active or passive form. My enthusiasm for sports is deeply rooted in me. In the course of my involvement in sports organizations, I have also met several great and interesting people, for which I am also very grateful to have known them. This also forms a part of my world of sports, which in some cases has a strong influence on my everyday professional, or personal life.

6. In your opinion, what is the role of inclusion through sport?

As I mentioned in one of the answers, sport is a phenomenon. It can bring people together across various areas, even where it is very difficult under other circumstances. Whether it is political, racial, gender, or even age or mental barriers. Especially in this period, support for inclusion is therefore extremely important, not only in sports.

7. Which sporting values are close to you? How has sport influenced you the most?

Hmm, a challenging question, although it may not seem so at first glance 😊 There are indeed many values that I have taken from sports and also embrace. I would say that it is a continuous process. However, I would mention those fundamental values that have influenced me since childhood. Sport has taught me mainly respect for others, as well as for myself, humility, patience, and how to accept possible defeats or face new challenges.

8. If you had to name three values that sport has taught you, what would they be? Why?

Respect, because without it, sportsmanship cannot exist. Discipline, because it is the foundation of progress and success in any field, including sports. And perseverance, because it is often the determining factor between giving up and achieving one's goals.

9. What has sport given you besides just playing sports?

Since I consider sport as a lifestyle, it is evident that it extends beyond the boundaries of physical activity alone. Thanks to sport, I have met many people in life (from early childhood to the present), many of whom have become good friends or acquaintances. In addition, sport gives me a different perspective on the world, precisely because of the values mentioned in the previous question. When I think about it, sport influences me quite significantly.

10. Have you participated, or are you planning to participate in any sports competitions? Do you have any specific sporting challenges?

Excellent question 😊 I have to laugh because you are the one who motivated me to try something again in a competitive manner. So the answer is yes, I am trying to prepare for running races, which I have been focusing on primarily in recent times. It is a real challenge for me because I run more for my own pleasure than for performance. But in everyone who has ever participated in sports, there is a bit of a competitive spirit, so thank you for inspiring me to take this step 😊



11. In conclusion of our interview, I would like to ask your opinion on the current sports program of the European Union. What else should the European Union do to encourage more young people to embrace sports as a lifestyle?

Well, that is not an easy question at all. There is probably no universal solution to encourage young people to engage in sports, but in my opinion, something different works for everyone. Therefore, it is all the more important to constantly introduce new modern projects and topics that can appeal to various groups of young people. Then there is a greater likelihood that some of them will be inspired to the extent that sport becomes their lifestyle with immense benefits.

12. Is there anything we have not asked you that you would like to share with us in this interview?

I am thinking about what to add at the end; perhaps just to say that I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to share my perspective on sports 😊

PROFILE:

GENERAL PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND Julián Vojtech started a professional career at the National Sport Centre, where working from 2005 until 2008 as a Head of ICT Department. Currently a freelancer, with a close affinity to sport, working with significant sport stakeholders, such as the Slovak Olympic and Sport Committee, Slovak Olympic Academy, Slovak Pierre de Coubertin Committee, National Sport Centre, just to mention a few of them. Technically and digitally supported all the sports events organised in the framework of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016.

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE Leading and directing many national initiatives in ICT and physical education, including curriculum and qualifications development, Olympic related matters and presenting internationally and nationally. Being responsible for policy development for ICT and physical education/sport, invited to numerous international conferences abroad. Close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic in the field of creating unified information system for sport and physical culture.

TROPHIES, AWARDS, JURY, PUBLICATIONS Published nationally and internationally, including publications within Erasmus + projects funded by the European Union. On the editorial board of national physical education journal of the Slovak national sport centre entitled Športinform.

INTERESTS, HOBBIES, FOREIGN LANGUAGES Table-tennis, football, Nordic walking, nature, traveling, capturing new places through photographic lenses. Lifelong philosophy is in doing things together in a transparent and efficient way for everybody involved. Fluent in English and Russian languages.

SPORT RELATED ACHIEVEMENTS Sport career focused on football, an expert in ICT and digital skills. Blending sport with nature, connecting sports and technology, blending real and virtual life challenges, focusing on platforms, youth, sports and education.



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EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS Graduating University of Žilina in Slovakia, with specialisation on applied mathematics, 2004. Numerous lifelong learning activities within the Slovak national sport centre in the field of management, marketing, finance, media, negotiation, and presentation skills, including communication training.

