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# Strategies for organizing sports events safely and healthily during COVID-19 at the university level: perceptions of Indonesian and Hungarian coach

*Strategie organizacji imprez sportowych w sposób bezpieczny i zdrowy w czasie pandemii COVID-19 na poziomie uniwersyteckim: spostrzeżenia trenerów z Indonezji i Węgier*

**Imam Marsudi<sup>1(A,B,C,D,E,F,G)</sup>, Mochamad Ridwan<sup>1(A,B,C,D,E,G)</sup>, Kunjung Ashadi<sup>1(B,D,E,G)</sup>, Muhammad Kharis Fajar<sup>1(A,B,D,E,G)</sup>, Zsolt Németh<sup>2(A,B,C,D,E)</sup>, Martin Hofmeister<sup>3(A,C,D,E)</sup>, Edi Setiawan<sup>4(A,C,D,E)</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>University of Pécs, Hungary

<sup>3</sup>Consumer Centre of the German Federal State of Bavaria, Germany

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Suryakencana, Indonesia

## Abstract

**Purpose.** The COVID-19 outbreak had led difficulties in carrying out sports events and limited research investigated the strategies in organizing sports events during COVID-19 generated a gap and novelty in this research. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions from coaches about strategies in organizing sport events at the university level.

**Material and Methods.** This research used a qualitative with phenomenological method. Participants involved in this study were coaches who had experience in organizing sports events, which came from the State University of Surabaya (Indonesia) (n = 5) and the University of Pécs (Hungary) (n = 5). This study used in-depth interviews with participants during 30 minutes. Data was analyzed using qualitative thematic statistical, namely copying, understanding the text and coding into three themes

**Results.** The results indicate that most of the coaches applied various strategies in organizing sports events, for example limiting the number of participants, implementation time, physical distancing, using masks and hand sanitizers. In addition, they argued that technology and funding were supporting factors to assist the success in organizing sports events. Apart from that, it was necessary to minimize the inhibiting factors in order to optimize the implementation.

**Conclusions.** Thus, this study confirms that to achieve the success in organizing sports events at the university level, it is necessary to consider the strategies and supporting factors. This research contributes to existing knowledge by providing information and scientific insight to coaches, athletes and stakeholders, to implement the appropriate strategy in organizing sports event during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

## Keywords

coach's perception, organizing sports strategy, phenomenological method

## Streszczenie

**Cel.** Wybuch pandemii COVID-19 doprowadził do trudności w przeprowadzaniu wydarzeń sportowych, a ograniczone badania dotyczące strategii organizacji wydarzeń sportowych podczas pandemii COVID-19 spowodowały lukę, a jednocześnie możliwość przeprowadzenia nowych badań. Dlatego niniejsze badanie ma na celu zbadanie opinii trenerów na temat strategii organizacji imprez sportowych na poziomie uniwersyteckim.

**Materiał i metody.** W badaniach zastosowano metodę jakościową z fenomenologiczną. Uczestnikami badania byli trenerzy mający doświadczenie w organizowaniu imprez sportowych, z Państwowego Uniwersytetu Surabaya (Indonezja) (n = 5) oraz Uniwersytetu w Peczu (Węgry) (n = 5). W badaniu wykorzystano wywiady z uczestnikami trwające 30 minut. Dane zostały przeanalizowane przy użyciu jakościowych zagadnień statystycznych, a mianowicie kopiowania, rozumienia tekstu i kodowania w trzech motywach.

**Wyniki.** Wyniki wskazują, że większość trenerów stosowała różne strategie przy organizacji imprez sportowych, np. ograniczanie liczby uczestników, czasu realizacji, dystans fizyczny, stosowanie maseczek i środków do dezynfekcji rąk. Ponadto argumentowali, że technologia i finansowanie są czynnikami wspomagającymi sukces w organizacji imprez sportowych. Oprócz tego konieczne było zminimalizowanie czynników hamujących w celu zoptymalizowania realizacji.

**Wnioski.** Niniejsze badanie potwierdza, że osiągnięcie sukcesu w organizacji imprez sportowych na poziomie uniwersyteckim wymaga rozważenia strategii i czynników wspierających. Badania te wnoszą wkład do istniejącej wiedzy, dostarczając informacji i wglądu naukowego trenerom, sportowcom i zainteresowanym stronom, aby wdrożyć odpowiednią strategię organizacji imprez sportowych podczas kryzysu związanego z pandemią COVID-19.

## Słowa kluczowe

spostreżenia trenerów, strategia organizacji wydarzenia sportowego, metoda fenomenologiczna

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis which happened from 2019 until now, has caused millions humans deaths globally [1, 2]. This situation forced governments in all countries implement the restrictions and protocols to stop the spread of COVID-19, such as social distancing, lock down or stay at home [3, 4]. These regulations have had a huge detrimental impact on several sectors, such as shops, industry, worship, tourism [(5), education [6, 7, 8] until suspended and temporarily banned sport events at the national and international levels [9, 10, 11]. A recent study reported that sports competitions should be

cancelled, postponed or rearranged respected to COVID-19 protocols and without spectators [12]. In addition, several data recorded that several international sport events had to be postponed, such as the Olympic Games in Japan [13, 14] and the European Football Championship for men, a football league in Sweden [15], UEFA Euro 2020, Tour de France [16], tennis tournaments, cycling classic Paris-Roubaix 2020 [17]. The policies to stop or postpone the competition caused financial losses, for example the League Premier had to lose \$1.25 billion in revenue, Tokyo 2020 Olympics had to lose more than \$13 billion [18].

**Table 1. List of sports events affected by COVID-19**

Sports Events	Country	Description
Tokyo 2020 Olympics	Japan	Stopped and rescheduled
Premier League	England	Postponed competition and players played behind closed doors
The Tokyo Summer Olympic and Paralympics games	Japan	Postpone competition
England's FIH Pro League games	England	Postpone competition
Major League Rugby (MLR)	USA and Canada	Postpone competition
Baseball league	Mexico and Puerto Rico	Discontinued and rescheduled
Motorsport	Portugal	Postpone competition
NBA	USA and Canada	Postpone competition

*Note. Source: Own study based on data retrieved from the Scopus index journal (02 October, 2022)*

COVID-19 pandemic had also hampered sports events which previously regularly organized at the university level. Sports events held at the university level involved large numbers of athletes, coaching staffs and also attracted large crowds of spectators or supporters from respective universities, thus this can potentially spreading the Corona virus [19]. According to Duclos-Bastías, Vallejo-Reyes, Giakoni-Ramírez & Parra-Camacho [20], sports events at the university level must be temporarily suspended, to prevent the spread of the Corona virus among athletes and coaches/lecturers. The cessation of sports events at the university level will have an impact on the decline in performance, income and achievements of the athletes. In addition, the cessation of sports competitions caused athletes faced financial problem [21] and many of them should drop out from the university. Previous studies reported that 65% of female athletes suffered lost income due to the effects of COVID-19 [22]. Based on these data and facts, there is a controversy whether sports events at the university level can be held safely and run effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited research on investigating strategies for organizing sports events during COVID-19 was a gap and novelty in this study. Thus, this study aims to investigate perceptions from coaches regarding the strategies in implementing sports events at the university level. This research contributes to existing knowledge by providing information and scientific insight to all policy makers (e.g., coaches/lecturers, athletes, universities and the government), to implement an appropriate strategy in organizing sports.

## Material and methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods [23, 24, 7]. We used the phenomenological method in this study to investigate the perceptions of coaches regarding their experiences or strategies in implementing sports events at the university level.

### Participants

The participants were coaches from the State University of Surabaya (Indonesia) ( $n = 5$ ) and the University of Pecs (Hungary) ( $n = 5$ ). We took advantage of the personal relationship between the researchers and the participants, so that they were willing to be interviewed in this study. To maintain the identity of the participants, then the researchers gave the symbol "P" for their initial.

### Participant Recruitment

The recruitment process followed this step: (i) researchers sent invitations to participants via e-mail, (ii) researchers recorded the number of coaches who were willing to be involved in this study, (iii) selected coaches that had experience in organizing sports events during the COVID-19 pandemic, (iv) coaches were asked to sign a statement letter about their willingness to be involved in this research, (v) coaches who involved this study got a \$20 gift. The details of demographics of participants is presented in Table 2.



**Table 2. Demographics of the participants**

Participants	Gender	Age	Experiences	Role
P1	Male	35	5	Board member
P2	Male	40	6	Deputy chairperson
P3	Female	45	7	Board secretary
P4	Male	39	5	Deputy chairperson
P5	Male	44	8	Deputy chairperson
P6	Female	37	4	Chairperson
P7	Male	40	6	Deputy chairperson
P8	Male	41	6	Chairperson
P9	Male	37	5	Board member
P10	Female	47	10	Chairperson

### Instruments

To reveal the perception of coaches regarding their strategies in carrying out sports events during the COVID-19 pandemic, we used in-depth interviews during 30 minutes per individual [7]. Through interviews it was possible to obtain clear descriptions, full of meaning, understandable and able to be fully expressed [25]. By using this instrument, we communicated directly with the coaches, so that they were able to understand the information from the expression.

### Procedures

This research was conducted from 27 to 28 October 2022 through interviews via Whatapss. This research had obtained approval from the head of the physical education study program with the permit number: 09/UNESA-10/PP/2022. In carrying out this research, researchers followed the World Medical Association (Helsinki Declaration). In-depth interviews were carried out for 30 minutes per individual. Researchers were able to interview 5 participants in one day.

### Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with participants regarding their perceptions of strategies in implementing sports events at the university level during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted using Bahasa for participants from Indonesia and English for participants from Hungary. The results of the in-depth interviews were collected by the researchers and analyzed with a qualitative thematic analysis [26].

### Data Analysis

Data obtained from in-depth interviews were processed through thematic analysis [23, 7]. The thematic analysis procedure started from recording, understanding the text and verifying the thematic structure. This analysis was used to distinguish, identify, and analyze patterns or themes in interview data which were collected and recorded via Whatsapps. This study involved the reduction and retrieval most of data information. The data were investigated thematically with qualitative coding techniques, ie a qualitative analysis occurred when we

broke down data, interpreted it conceptually, and integrated it to formulate theory. Thematic analysis generated groups, patterns or themes that were interrelated and described the current phenomenon [25]. The three major themes discussed in this study were theme 1 regarding the strategy in organizing sports events, theme 2 about supporting factors in the implementation of sports events and theme 3 about inhibiting factors for carrying out sports events.

### Results

The results of in-depth interviews with participants obtained various perceptions, as follows:

#### Theme 1: Strategy in organizing sports events

##### *Number of Participants*

The first strategy that must be considered when planning to carry out a sports event at the university level during the COVID-19 pandemic was the number of participants. A high number of participants had a greater potential to transmit virus among participants [19]. In this case the participants revealed that:

*"When holding sports events at the university level, I was used to limiting the number of participants so that the number of participants was, so that I can control the distance between participants. And this method was effective in reducing the transmission of the Corona virus and sports events could run successfully" (Interviewed with P1, P3).*

*"Limited number of participants was much more effective in the current pandemic crisis. On the other hand, if the number of participants in sports events at university exceeded 100 participants, it caused difficulties for me to monitor them and eventually some participants were affected by COVID-19, this condition often forgotten by the organizers of sports events" (Interviewed with P4, P9, P10).*

*In my opinion, it doesn't matter how many participants are involved in a sport event, but it must be balanced with the number of committees. If the number of participants in sports events was high, means the number organizing committee would high. Thus, sports events could run smoothly" (Interviewed with P7, P5, P8).*

"Sports events held at the university level attracted a lot of athletes to participate, so I limited the number of participants. For example, in a soccer sport event, only 7 to 8 teams participated. This strategy was used to assist soccer competitions can run smoothly and without any obstacles" (Interviews with P2, P6, P7).

### The Implementation Time

The second strategy that must be considered in carrying out sports competitions was the implementation time. The implementation time of a sport event should be considered carefully to minimize transmission of the Corona virus. In this case the participants revealed that:

"According to my experience in managing sports events, the competition schedule should not be tight and must be managed carefully. For example, in basketball, it should be only 4 teams that were allowed to compete in one day" (Interviewed with P2, P4, P6, P10).

"In one day, the maximum number that allowed to compete was 4 teams and after completed their competition, they should not be allowed to watch other competition, this restriction was made to reduce the crowd among the participants" (Interviewed with P5, P7, P9).

"The strategy to arrange competition schedule is a powerful method to create a conducive and safe competition atmosphere, because if the number of team is smaller that competes in one day, so the risk of transmission between athletes and coaches will be lower" (Interviewed with P1, P3, P8).

### Physical Distancing

Physical distancing is one of the strategies that has been used in carrying out any activities, including in organizing sports events at the national and international levels. When sports competitions were allowed to be held, it was important to apply the standard COVID-19 protocol, one of which was physical distancing among athletes [27]. In this case the participants gave the perception that:

"Every time I carry out sports events on campus, I often apply rules for physical distancing between athletes and coaches, to

reduce the possibility of transmission of COVID-19" (Interviewed with P2, P5).

"The physical distancing strategy is a method that I often use when organizing sports competitions, because it has been proven to ensure the safety of athletes and coaches as well as the arrangement of events can run smoothly" (Interview with P1, P4).

"Physical distancing could reduce physical contact between athletes and coaches. I arranged the distance around 2 to 3 meters between one person and another" (Interviewed with P3, P6, P7).

"Based on my experience, when carrying out sports events at the student level, many of them ignored the rules of the COVID-19 protocol, especially physical distancing, so that many athletes were affected by COVID-19 and this impacted to postpone the competition schedule" (Interviewed with P8, P9, P10).

### Using Face Mask and Hand Sanitizer

The last strategy was to use masks and hand sanitizers when participating in sports events at the national level. According to Moritz et al [28], masks and hand sanitizers has been proven to reduce the spread of COVID-19 between individuals. Participants mentioned that:

"All athletes and coaches are required to wear a mask before the competition starts, because it can cover the nose and mouth which are the main routes for the entry of the Corona virus into the body. This rule applies not only to athletes and coaches but also to us as the organizing committee for sports events" (Interviewed with P2, P6, P10).

"Through the application of hand sanitizers, participants are protected from bacteria, germs and the Corona virus and masks keep them in a healthy and safety condition. In this way I was successful in organizing sports events on our university" (Interviewed with P4, P5, P9).

"Every time I hold a sports event on campus, using masks and hand sanitizers are mandatory rule. If participants did not use masks and hand sanitizers, the committee would send a warning" (Interview with P1, P3, P7, P8).

All the strategies described above have an important role and the main key to success in organizing sports events at the university level and all these strategies must be implemented, so that sports events can run smoothly.

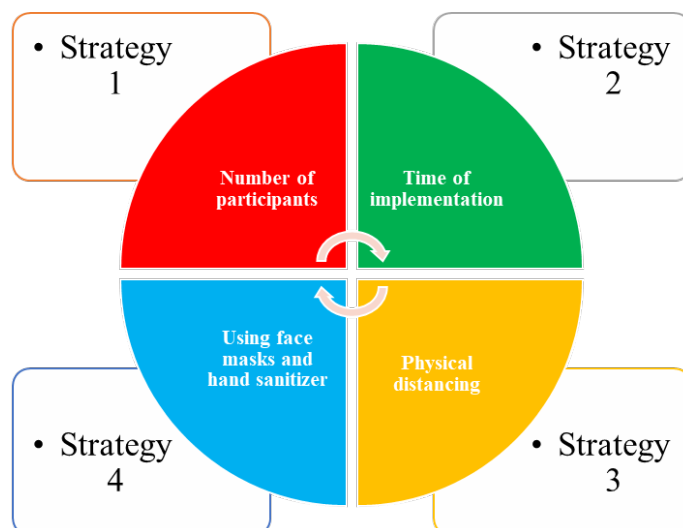


Figure 1. Strategy for implementing sports events

## Theme 2: Supporting factors in organizing sports events Technology Facilities

Facility was a supporting factor in organizing sports events at the university level during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Facilities that can be used in the form of sophisticated technology media. In this case the participants gave their opinion that:

*"The facilities that must be prepared when carrying out sports competitions in the current pandemic era are technology media. We often hold meetings between the committee and participants via virtual, so this is an effective way to reduce physical contact" (Interviewed with P1, P2, P5).*

*"I used technology in sports activities, for example in martial arts. The participants who had not competed were able to watch the competition virtually" (Interview with P3, P4, P7).*

*"Participants who did not have schedule to participate in competition were not required to attend the competition at university, they only watched the game virtually at the zoom meeting. I used to do this method continuously when I was the chairman of the organizing committee for sports events" (Interviewed with P6, P8).*

*"Technology facility is a supporting factor to ensure the sports competitions could run smoothly, by using technology meeting and the competition can be carried out in two systems, namely online and offline. We recommended this method to be used" (Interviewed with P9, P10).*

## Funding

Funding was other factor to support the implementation of sports events at the university level. Participants gave their opinion that:

*"Funding is an important supporting factor, if the fund provided by the university was small, the facilities for sports activities would be limited. For example, there is no masks and hand sanitizers for athletes and coaches" (Interviewed with P4, P5, P9).*

*"Funds have an important role!!...Supporting with large funds, allow the committee to prepare complete facilities to support the sports events. The facilities are included: (i) masks, (ii) hand sanitizers, (iii) hand washing stations, (iv) PCR test sites" (Interviewed with P1, P2, P3, P9).*

*"The amount of fund which provided by university is highly determined the success in organizing sports events at the university level. Supporting by large funds, the committee can buy internet quotas that are used for virtual meetings. In addition, they can prepare location of medical and vaccine for participants" (Interviews with P6, P7, P8, P10).*

## Theme 3: Inhibiting factors in the implementation of sports events Facility

Facilities can be a supporting or inhibiting factor in organizing sports events during the current pandemic. In this case the participants gave their opinion that:

*"If the facilities are inadequate, this can be an inhibiting factor in the implementation of sports events, so that it has an impact on the success rate" (Interviews with P6, P7, P9, P10).*

*"Most of the sports events were fail due to lack of attention from committee to the facilities for participants. For example, the absence of health services for participants or not im-*

*plementing the standard COVID-19 protocol" (Interview with P1, P4, P5, P8).*

*"According to my experience, failure in carrying out sports events is due to several factors, such as (i) a limited number and damaged sports equipment, (ii) did not use professional referees, (iii) did not provide health and security personnel, (iv) did not use media technology" (Interview with P2, P3).*

## Committee's Readiness

Readiness is the next inhibiting factor in organizing sports events at the university level during COVID-19. Participants were mentioned that:

*"The readiness and professionalism of committee as an inhibiting factor for the implementation of sports events. For example, committees were not responsible for their duties, committees rarely attended meetings and unskilled committees as factors that cause failure in carrying out sports events" (Interviews with P4, P7, P8, P9).*

*"A committee which has a low level of readiness will have an impact on the implementation of sports events. For example, many participants were exposed to COVID-19 and the competition did not accordance to schedule" (Interview with P1, P2, P5, P10).*

*"The readiness of the committee, especially the chairman of the committee, is a determining factor to ensure the sports events are conducted without any obstacles at the university level during COVID-19. Several obstacles often arise when the committee do not have any preparation, such as the program of activities not running, many participants protesting and resigning from the activity" (Interviewed with P3, P6).*

## Discussion

Our study aims to investigate strategies for organizing sports events at university level during the COVID-19 period from coaches' point of view.

The findings in this study indicated that the majority of coaches' perceptions emphasized to apply the right strategy in organizing sports events in a pandemic crisis. The first strategy was applying a relatively small number of participants so that facilitated the committee in controlling the competition. The second strategy was to arrange the competition schedule not to be tight in one day, so that the activities can be more efficient and conducive. The third strategy was to apply physical distancing between individuals [29] and the last strategy was to use masks [30, 31, 32] and hand sanitizer [28, 33]. These results are in line with previous studies which mentioned that in order to minimize the risk of transmission and failure in carrying out sports events, there are several factors that need to be considered, such as cleanliness and physical distance [34, 35], using face masks, checking the symptoms of COVID-19, strict supervision and adequate facilities [27]. In addition, according to coaches, technology media and funding is a supporting factor to achieve success in carrying out sports events [36]. Previous studies have proven that technology and large funding could facilitates in carrying out activities in the current era, for example meetings and competition can be conducted online or offline [37, 25]. According to Wen & Wang [38], technology provided information in a fast way and is a major factor in im-



plementating large-scale sports events. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors that mentioned by coaches must be minimized as small as possible, to ensure the competition could run conducive and successful.

### Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on this study results, it can be concluded that the majority of coaches agreed to carry out sports events during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and emphasized in implementing strategies from the number of participants, implementation time, physical distancing, using masks and hand sanitizers and can minimize inhibiting factors, so that the organization of sports events can run smoothly. This research contributes in providing information, understanding and insight to stakeholders (e.g., coaches, athletes, universities and the government) about appropriate and effective strategies in carrying out sports events

at the university level during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. The sample size is relatively small and did not involve participants from several universities in Indonesia, which means that the results of this study was a small representation of perception of coaches. In the future, it will be important to involved more participants so that they can dig up more information about perceptions of coaches regarding the strategies in organizing sports events as well as discuss the coach's perception of the strategy in organizing virtual sports events at the international level.

Adres do korespondencji / Corresponding author

**Imam Marsudi**

E-mail: [imammarsudi@unesa.ac.id](mailto:imammarsudi@unesa.ac.id)

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