

Top Level Military Athletes in Italy: Present Situation and Perspectives

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1. The "top level" military athletes play a very important role in the Italian national sport. In this sense, some significant figures from international Sport Events of the last 5 years:
 - 1994: Winter Olympic Games in LILLEHAMMER (NORWAY):
16 (of 20) medals won by Military Athletes;
 - 1995: 1st Military World Games: 2nd place (behind Russia) in the Nation's rating;
 - 1996: Olympic Games in ATLANTA: 113 Military Athletes (of 350 components of the Italian Delegation) won 19 (of 35) medals;
 - 1997: Mediterranean Games and University World Games: more than 50% of the medals won by Italian Delegation belong to the Military Athletes (even less than 35%);
 - 1998: Winter Olympic Games in NAGANO (Japan): 12 athletes (of 14) which won Olympic medals, belong to the Military Sport Groups.

The today "top level" military athletes include 2 categories of personnel (about 2500 athletes, men and women):

- "conscripts" (approx. 1000): 10 months of mandatory military duty;
 - "long-term service" personnel (approx. 1500): particularly within Units of Police.
2. Italy is now approaching a new structure for the Armed Forces (more "volunteers" incl. female personnel, who will progressively replace the "conscripts") with significant reduction of places within Military Sport Units.

The "volunteers" spend 90% of their time in training, in order to maintain the sport performances at national or international level. When they will be no more able to perform high-level sport activity, they can become good trainers or technicians.

"Top level" athletes belong to 9 Military Sport Groups:

- 3 of the Armed Forces (Army Navy and Air Force) which will continue to have "conscripts";
- 6 of the Police Groups depending on different Ministry (CARABINIERI, FINANCE GUARDS, FOREST GUARDS, NATIONAL POLICE, FIREMEN, PRISON GUARDS).

A very important (and not easy) function for the co-ordination of these 9 Groups, it is the activity of the Sport Office in the General Staff of Defence. This Office is - at the same time - Liaison Office with the Italian National Olympic Committee (C.O.N.I.) and with the 39 National Sport Federations. The essential functions made by this Office are:

- recruitment of "top level" athletes;
- co-ordination of teams activity for CISM competitions;
- allocation of financial resources (also from C.O.N.I.);
- control of national and international results.

3. The perspectives for the future activity of "top level" military athletes remain positive. In effect, the today co-operation between civilian and military sport in Italy will continue with mutual advantages. The "top level" athletes will still find in the Military Sport Groups:
- social and economical security;
 - outstanding technicians and sport infrastructures;
 - a frame of "necessary discipline".

On the other side, the military sport will continue to keep significant advantages from "top level" athletes, today in the quality of "testimonials" and, in the future, as good trainers or technicians.

In this perspective, the organisational system today very effective in Italy will maintain its validity also for the future. I do not know if this system (or "model") could be valid also for other nations, in any case, it would be contribution for deeper analysis and discussion.