

Perceptions of dual career development among elite level swimmers and basketball players



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study was to (1) examine swimmers' and basketball players' perceptions of their dual career development (2) explore these perceptions for possible differences between male and female participants as well as between swimmers and basketball players.

Design and method: Semi-structured interviews with 12 retired Slovene elite level swimmers and basketball players (six males and six females) were used to discuss about transitions, demands and challenges which occurred throughout their dual career development. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the qualitative analytic software program Nvivo 10.

Results: Qualitative analysis of interviews revealed that athletes perceived their athletic career in strong and reciprocal connection to other domains in their lives, i.e. academic/vocational, psychological, psychosocial, financial level. Some of the transitions occurring in their dual career were experienced as particularly important (e.g., transition to university, finishing university study) and connected to several challenges occurring at different levels of development. Differences between male and female participants, swimmers and basketball players in this study were identified.

Conclusion: The study revealed a usefulness of using a holistic perspective when investigating athletes' dual career development, and a reciprocal nature of transitions occurring at different levels of athletes' development.

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The topic of athletic career development and transitions has been evolving in recent decades and studies on career development and transition have shown a substantial increase in both quality and quantity (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). Together with this evolution the number of theoretical models on athletes' career development has increased. Different models of athletic career development were proposed (e.g., Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova et al., 2009; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994, 2001; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004) and several career assistance programs were established to support athletes' personal and athletic development, to balance their lifestyle, or to optimize their post-athletic career life (e.g., Olympic Job Opportunities Program; Canadian Olympic Athlete Career Centre; the United States' Career Assistance Program for Athletes; Athlete Career and Education

Program; for a review see Gordon, Lavalley, & Grove; 2005). Based upon research and applied work with a significant number of athletes from different sport backgrounds and levels of performance, Wylleman and Lavalley (2004) developed the developmental model of transitions faced by athletes. This model was later elaborated and developed into the Holistic Athletic Career model (Fig. 1) (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013) and provides a description of the nature and types of transitions athletes may face throughout their athletic lifespan, together with describing transitions that take place at psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational and financial level. In this perspective, the model takes a holistic or "whole person" approach by taking into consideration athletes' development in different domains in his life (i.e., athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial); and a developmental or "whole-career" approach by describing the athletic career from initiation into sport to adjustment on life after athletic career termination.

As conceptualized by the Holistic Athletic Career model (Wylleman et al., 2013), there are constant interactions between all levels of athletes' development throughout their sporting careers.

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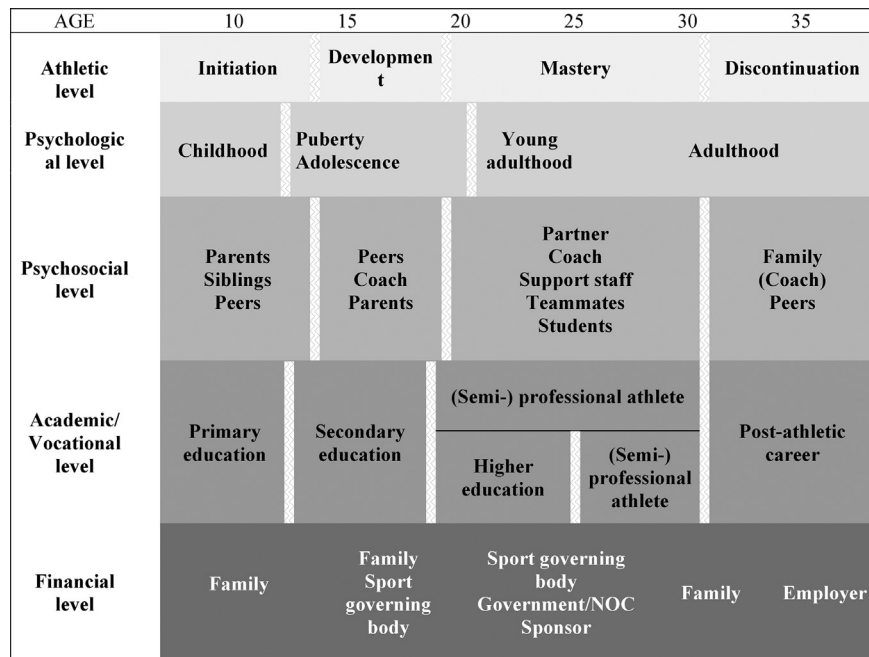


Fig. 1. The Holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013).

Transitions occurring in the athletic level are in concurrent and reciprocal interaction with transitions occurring in other domains of athletes' lives (e.g. academic, psychosocial, and financial). Athletes must therefore successfully develop their athletic career together with pursuing their education and/or work as well as other domains which are of importance at different stages in life. Such requirement for athletes to successfully initiate, develop and finalize their athletic career as part of a lifelong career, in combination with the pursuit of education and/professional occupation as well as other domains which are of importance at different stages of their development (e.g., taking up a role in society, becoming financially independent, developing an identity and a partner relationship), is encapsulated under the term "dual careers" (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012). Numerous studies (e.g., Lavalley, 2005; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2009; Pummell, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2008; Reints, 2011; Stambulova, Stephan, & Järphag, 2007) have shown that a dual career benefits athletes at different levels (a), social level (e.g., positive socialization effects, expanded social networks/support systems), b) health-related level (e.g., balanced lifestyle, reduced life stress, increases well-being), c) developmental level (e.g., better conditions to develop life skills, multiple personal identities, positive effects on athletes' self-regulation abilities), and d) financial level (e.g., higher employability). Benefits are reported to be also related to athletic retirement (e.g., better career/retirement planning, shorter adaptation period, prevention of identity crisis). Finally, dual career also brings positive outcomes to the sport system and the society as well (Stambulova, 2012) such as positive public image of sport and athletes, creating role models for young people and attracting them to do sports and motivating parents to introduce their child into sport.

Talented and elite athletes who combine their athletic career with education at secondary level or continue into higher education are required to invest their time and energy into two areas of achievement and constantly balance between their academic, athletic and social roles (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008). Combining an athletic career with education has been subject of

continued debate. While early research (e.g. Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982) indicated the negative effects of a dual career on academic success, recent research (e.g. Brettschneider, 1999; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006) suggests that talented athletes tend to perform well not only in sports but also in the academic setting by being highly motivated to perform well in both domains. Student-athletes were found to be determined to pursue both their education and sport by explaining that both connects their sense of identity, purpose and well-being (O'Neill, Allen, & Calder, 2013). Despite the positive outcomes of a dual career for student-athletes, managing both careers was found to be connected with a number of potential and anticipated problems for the athletes, including struggling to incorporate study with training and competition schedules, dealing with fatigue, facing financial concerns, being forced to make personal sacrifices (Burden, Tremayne, & Marsh Burden, 2004; O'Neill et al., 2013; Petitpas et al., 2009; Pummell et al., 2008). It is therefore important that elite student-athletes develop various individual competencies which will allow them to achieve excellence at both, the athletic and academic level, whilst keeping in balance their personal (i.e., psychological, psychosocial) development (De Knop, Wylleman, Van Hoecke, & Bollaert, 1999).

After finishing their academic career athletes, who cannot rely on a revenue-income via their athletic achievements, usually try to enter the job market to secure greater financial and personal security. Vocational training and the development of a professional occupation may also have a strong impact on an athlete's sport career (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Intensive training and competitions at home and abroad can be difficult to reconcile with the demands and restrictions in the working environment, and employers may find it difficult to adapt working conditions to the needs of athletes (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that obtaining vocational training and starting a professional occupation are main reasons for athletes to terminate their athletic career (e.g., Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Ceci Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004; Reints, 2011).

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