

Title: “All I Have to do is Pass”: A Discursive Analysis of Student Athletes’ Talk about Prioritising Sport to the Detriment of Education to Overcome Stressors Encountered in Combining Elite Sport and Tertiary Education

Author(s): Cosh, S. & Tully, P. J.

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Keywords: Collegiate athlete; University; Higher education; Time; Coping Stress; Educational attainment; Barriers; Australia; dual careers; time management; academic sacrifice

Sports: Hockey, rowing, Australian rules football, kayaking, baseball, equestrian, trampolining, table tennis, cricket, soccer, archery, fencing, water polo, athletics and netball

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Main theme: Personal characteristics

Secondary theme(s): Time management; expectations; role of institution

Aims: The aim of this study was to explore the conditions student-athletes come across that cause stress when combining higher education with their sporting careers. The study also explored the effect that combining the two pursuits might have on sporting and academic success.

Method: Twenty interviews were conducted with elite-level Australian student-athletes. Participants were a mixture of male and female and from a mixture of sports, including hockey, rowing, cricket and athletics.

Results and Practical Implications: The interviews showed that athletes can often set an academic goal as “just doing enough to pass”. They often explained that they felt they had to forego any academic goals to be able to combine both pursuits. Despite athlete’s recognising that their education would help them in their future and feeling that they were academically capable of achieving higher, they explained that “in-practice” academic success was not possible. Prioritising sport at the expense of education occurred even in the

absence of a requirement to reach a certain sporting level, as seen with some scholarship programs. Time was described as a common barrier to achieving their goals in both pursuits. However, athletes frequently described that, the way they spent their time was “out of their control” and that sport demanded too much of their time. This removed the athlete’s self-blame for poor educational results. Interestingly, time was seen in two ways by the student-athletes, either as fixed, limited and out of their control, or as flexible and controllable. The small number of athletes that described their time as flexible and controllable seemed to be better at combining the two pursuits. Universities and sporting governing bodies with athletes in education should consider additional support for athletes in managing their time and educational demands, so that academic success is not compromised. Also, they should consider additional flexibility from sport, so that athletes don’t feel that the way they spent their time is “out of their control”.

TASS have produced this lay summary. The full article is available (permissions may apply): [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258108788 All I have to do is pass A discursive analysis of student athletes' talk about prioritising sport to the detriment of education to overcome stressors encountered in combining elite sport and tertiary](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258108788_All_I_have_to_do_is_pass_A_discursive_analysis_of_student_athletes'_talk_about_prioritising_sport_to_the_detriment_of_education_to_overcome_stressors_encountered_in_combining_elite_sport_and_tertiary)