

**Title:** Events of Athletic Career: A Comparison Between Career Paths

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**Main Theme:** Career Trajectory

**Secondary Theme:** Holistic Support

**Aims:** This article uses the holistic athletic career model to compare the athletic career events of elite levels who follow differing career paths within Spain.

**Method:** Participants consisted of 476 (62.5% male and 37.5% female) retired Spanish athletes within 32 different Olympic sports. Of the 476 athletes, 62.4% experienced studying and developing their elite sports career at the same time (a dual career), from these athletes, 127.1% followed a convergent path (where sport is the priority) and 21.7% followed a parallel path (both sport and education were of equal importance). In addition, 21.4% of the athletes had combined sport with work, and 16.2% of the athletes had followed a linear path (full-time athlete). The athletes completed questionnaires and analyses were made between the athletes differing career paths.

**Results and Practical Implications:** Results found that the starting age of sport was similar for student-athlete and full-time athletes, whereas athletes who combined a sport and work career started their sport at a later age. The earlier choices around career paths are often decided by the athlete's parents. Interestingly, the study found that athletes who were also studying entered the mastery phase (increase in training load, greater commitment to competitions, move to a high-performance centre) earlier than athletes taking other career

paths. This is often because the high-performance centres that athletes enter facilitate a dual career by having a school on site. Due to the limited flexibility within higher education institutes in Spain that help to facilitate a dual career, it is suggested that the reason many athletes quit studying is due to the difficulty they experienced combining both sport and academics. In addition, athletes undertaking a sport and education dual career reached their peak sporting performance on average 3 to 4 years earlier than athletes in full-time sport and athletes who were combining sport and work. Therefore, the results off support to undertaking a dual career route, the benefits associated with a dual career route (e.g., less pressure, increased socialisation) may have led to these earlier peak performances. However, the study also found that the length of the mastery phase was shorter for student-athletes than the other groups, which could be explained by a delay in identity shifts due to a lack of non-sporting life experiences. The student-athletes in this study retired from their sport 4 to 5 years earlier than the other groups of athletes, which is suggested as being due to their higher-level planning for their life after sport. In sum, following a dual career pathway in sport and education is perceived to be the best career path to take, due to a higher level of preparation for retirement and the possibility of reaching peak sporting performance in a shorter time frame.

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