

Title: Perceptions of Dual Career Development Among Elite Level Swimmers and Basketball Players

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Year: 2015

Keywords: Dual career, transitions, sport and education, university

Sports: Swimming, basketball

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Main theme: Transitions

Secondary theme(s): Social support

Aims: The purpose of the study was to examine swimmers' and basketball players' understanding and perceptions of their dual-career development and explore whether there are differences between males and females and between swimmers and basketball players. **Method:** Data was collected via interviews with 12 athletes who participated in swimming and basketball. All participants had retired from international sport within the last three years. Questions were asked based on the athlete's whole career.

Results and Practical Implications: Results suggest that there are differences in the path to excellence for athletes undertaking a dual-career. These include occasional decreases in performance due to injuries, over-training and premature withdrawal from sport due to financial difficulties. Some of the transitions that the athletes identified throughout their dual-career of sport and studies could be considered to be less predictable. These included the death of a family member and the ending an intimate relationship. Predictable transitions (e.g., entering university) can be prepared for in advance with proper career guidance and support, whereas less predictable transitions can result in increased difficulties. Results also suggest that unlike at the time of primary and secondary level education, during university, the athletes experienced the combination of an academic and

athletic career as more difficult. This was related to experiencing a high load of academic and athletic work, and not receiving enough organisational support from the university to overcome this. Results suggest that the transition to university for athletes led to a new set of demands within their education (less structured environment with more flexible approach to study, less supervision, more independence), and within their sport (moving to a new training group, changing a coach).

Despite believing that their dual-career at university was difficult at times, the athletes saw their dual-career as a good investment into their future career, explaining that being involved into both gave them a sense of personal satisfaction and self-confidence. These benefits should be emphasised to athletes by coaches and support staff. Female athletes in the study achieved higher levels of education, which is linked also to the fact that they expressed higher determination to obtain an academic degree and reported about working hard, taking a more organised approach. In the later stages of career development, male participants in this study perceived that support from their spouse was important, but females did not perceive the same. Some of the participants reported avoiding having an intimate relationship because of their belief that their dual-career does not allow them to allocate the time in their social life together with sport and study. Results suggest that type of sport might also influence the dual-career of athletes. Basketball players in this study reported entering sport later and having a longer duration of the athletic career in comparison to swimmers. As such, basketball players often brought up the topics of ageing, while a physically demanding training system in swimming since a very young age might explain why swimmers more often mentioned the issues of being extremely tired and/or over trained in their dual-career. Support staff should endeavour to understand how different sports can affect the dual-career.

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