

Title: Reconciling the Maintenance of On-Field Success with Off-Field Player Development: A Case Study of a Club Culture within the Australian Football League

Author(s): Pink, M., Saunders, J. & Stynes, J.

Year: 2015

Keywords: Dual career development; Professional sporting club; Australia; Professional athletes

Sport(s): Australian-rules football

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Main Theme: Role of Institution

Secondary Theme(s): Wellbeing and Mental Health, Career Planning

Aims: The aim of this study was to look at one professional Australian Football club specifically because, it had been recognised as being successful in supporting its players in working towards an additional career whilst training and competing as an elite athlete (dual career development). The club had approximately 85% of its players involved in some form of dual career development. This was done whilst maintaining success on the field, by making regular appearances in finals and play-offs over the last ten years. The on-field success of the club suggests that their successful dual career development program was being achieved without compromising their athletic performance.

Method: To collect the data, researchers interviewed eleven players at the club and four non-playing staff, such as a coach, manager and player development manager. The researchers also observed the club and its culture for two weeks. This study, instead of looking at dual career challenges from an individual level (i.e., the dual career athlete), considers the club culture as an explanation of the success of a dual career development program.

Results and Practical Implications: The results suggest that a professional sporting club is more likely to adequately support dual career activities, when it truly believes in the value of dual career development and developing their players as a whole person. Furthermore, the club believed in a direct positive link between on-field performance and developing the player as a whole person. The club's culture was seen to believe in the following four mantras: dual career development is important but football comes first; balancing sport and off-field life ensures player's wellbeing, which enables on field performance; players should be encouraged to find personal meaning in their alternative career activity; the club has a responsibility to support the player's dual career activities.

The data suggests that to successfully support player dual career development, you need a comprehensive club culture that supports dual career activities. This case study provides a positive example of a professional club in full support of dual career activities. The support for dual career activities from all members within a sporting environment should be considered before implementing a dual career program. It is also important to highlight the role of the player development manager in guiding athletes to seek a dual career activity that they would view as worthwhile for them but, the decision ultimately lay with the player. The club in question described having support for dual career activities not only in the welfare department, but also from all other staff in the club, from the sport science departments to the executive management. The players themselves were encouraged by the player development manager, to seek an alternative career that they valued.

TASS have produced this lay summary. The full article is available (permissions may apply):
http://ac.els-cdn.com/S1469029214001952/1-s2.0-S1469029214001952-main.pdf?_tid=1429659a-4de1-11e7-ba46-00000aacb362&acdnat=1497101656_ae0ee68b0e87f99c6afa9913bb2db98a