

**Title:** Searching for an Optimal Balance: Dual Career Experiences of Swedish Adolescent Athletes

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**Keywords:** Adolescent athletes, athletic identity, dual career, student identity, transition

**Sport(s):** Mixed (27 different sports).

**Journal:** Psychology of Sport and Exercise

**Main Theme:** Transitions

**Secondary Theme(s):** Identity

**Aims:** The aim of this paper was to focus on individual's transition to an elite sport school (RIG). The research is based in Sweden, which has a system of elite sports schools for 16-18 year olds. Therefore, the following findings are mainly applicable to the experiences of Swedish 16-18 year olds transitioning into an elite school environment. However, this environment could have similarities with systems outside of Sweden, including university settings and therefore, could still give some helpful insights.

**Method:** The study involved 16 year old participants from a variety of sports, who were transitioning into an elite sports school. These participants completed three questionnaires at the start of their first year at the school and then again at the end of the first year. The three questionnaires are designed to measure dual career experience, athletic identity (degree to which the individual associates with their athletic role) and student identity (degree to which the individual associates with their student role). The main sample consisted of 250 male and female participants from a variety of sports. On top of this, ten individuals were selected to complete an interview at the beginning of the year and again at the end.

**Results and Practical Implications:** The results showed that dual career athletes described their demands and stress levels, in terms of sporting, school and personal life, as increasing over the year. The transition was often associated with a move away from home and therefore an increased responsibility for their private lives. These perceived transitional demands, along with pressure from school teachers, coping strategies in sport, social support at school and personal resources in private life were shown to contribute to the adjustment to the transition. To cope with these demands, the participants tended to assign more coping efforts into their sport rather than their school or private lives. As a consequence, individuals felt more adjusted in their sporting lives than their school or private lives. Participants named a “lack of free time”, “home sickness”, “deficit of life skills” (e.g., housekeeping and time management), and “being surrounded by the same people” as barriers to adjustment to the elite sport school. The results of this study provide recommendations for the Swedish system, but they also highlight the importance of pre-transition planning and preparation along with additional support before, during and after transition periods.

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