

Title: The Challenges of the Semi-Professional Footballer: A Case Study of the Management of Dual Career Development at a Victorian Football League (VFL) Club.

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Sport: Football

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Main theme: Dual career

Secondary themes: Challenges, club environment, athlete development

Aims: This study aims to highlight the challenges footballers experience in developing a dual career within a semi-professional club environment. The factors in the club environment that facilitated and impeded their dual career development were also examined.

Method: The study was conducted at a standalone VFL club. A total of 37 players and four staff members consented to participate in the study. Data collection was over a three month period comprised interviews, participant observations, and casual conversations with players and staff. Observations were recorded in fieldwork entries (i.e., within the football club) and interviews were used to represent players engaging in different dual career activities and therefore individuals had varying experience levels. A total of ten players and two staff members took part in the interview process.

Results and Practical Implications: The findings are presented under three main categories.

(1) Players view and experiences of dual career development: players believed it was a two-way responsibility (between themselves and the club), that they had to prioritise their non-athletic career, and that their occupation had to be compatible with VFL football. *(2)*

Personal approaches to dual career development: having a 'learn to deal with it' attitude and player's negative approaches to tertiary education (i.e., university). *(3) The environment*

and dual career development: A number of facilitating (e.g., consideration for work/study scheduling and opportunity for mentoring amongst the playing group) and challenging (e.g. trades, labouring, and compatibility with VFL football and having an inconsistent training schedule) factors relating to the relationship of the football with the dual career development of the players emerged from the participants responses. The study revealed the complexity of player's non-athletic work and study arrangements and how this relates to their ability to meet demands of the semi-professional sporting environment and level of challenge involved. In addition to the development of personal skills such as time management, developing an approach to dual career development that is: player driven; uses existing sources for mentorship and support and; recognises the specific challenges facing semi-professional footballers and their portfolios of work has the potential to support athletes in the development of their dual careers. This approach has the potential to attenuate the financial and logistical barriers to providing athlete support that can be observed in semi-professional sports. Additionally, player mentoring channels maybe a useful avenue for integrating more holistic support for athletes in clubs that have limited resources.

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<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1469029217304314>