

**Title:** The Challenges of a High Performing Student-Athlete

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**Main Theme:** Dual Career Challenges

**Secondary Theme:** Social Support

**Aims:** This article explores the challenges that student-athletes experience combining sport and education at an Irish university. In Ireland, 83% of universities offer sport scholarships to athletes, however, these are suggested to be insufficient in covering athletic costs. The article investigated the challenges faced by high-performance student athletes at a third-level institution in the Republic of Ireland. The study had a specific focus on how athletes combine their academic and sporting demands, what their behaviours are when facing burnout and fatigue, and what the social interactions of these individuals are.

**Method:** Nine participants (3 females, 6 males) aged between 21 and 31, across a number of sports and academic courses, and at differing stages in their university dual careers took part.

**Results and Practical Implications:** Results suggest that effective time management was crucial for student-athletes to control stress and optimise training. The increased need to effectively manage time was in part due to the increased training demands that student-athletes experienced when they moved into university. Student-athletes in the study understood the concept of balance but this was subjective and varied between athletes, as focus shifted amongst priorities throughout the year. The study also suggested that without a support framework, student-athletes struggled to cope with the duality of their roles, and

often felt frustrated at having to prioritise one over the other. Based on findings around the importance of a support system for student-athletes, the authors reflected on the developing system within Ireland, noting that due to a lack of structured arrangements between sporting governing bodies and academic institutions, support is often on an adhoc basis, opposed to being formalised. A further finding was that student-athletes may be susceptible to overtraining, as they may experience various external and internal stressors and without an inadequate understanding of the level of recovery needed to restore an optimum balance. In addition, the findings suggest that increased communication between the student-athlete and their coach may help to overcome this challenge, alongside access to counselling support. To conclude, this study represented some of the challenges that student-athletes at the university level in Ireland may be subject to experiencing when trying to balance the demands of their sport and education. The findings highlight challenges that replicate those of athletes in other countries, however, the undeveloped dual career system in Ireland may make the challenge of undertaking a dual career particularly present for these individuals, further highlighting the importance of a well-developed holistic support system for student-athletes.

TASS have produced this lay summary. The full article is available (permissions may apply):  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03323315.2018.1484299>