

Title: The Experience of Dual Career through Slovak Athletes' Eyes

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Aims: The aim of the study was to examine how elite athletes from Slovakia experience having a dual-career in either both work and sport or education, work and sport. More specifically, the study looked to gain an understanding of the athletes' attitudes towards education, perceived difficulties of having a dual career and how athletes are supported in their dual-career.

Method: Data was collected through interviews with Slovakian athletes in varying sports.

Results and Practical Implications: Results suggested that the athletes found the dual-career to be achievable but identified a number of challenges. The athletes perceived that at the moment they rely more on their skills and personal effort than an organised support system. In Slovakia, only athletes who achieve a high level in the European or World Championships are admitted into distance studies, and there are currently no formal structures in supporting the dual career within universities and national sport organisations. This may result in some ambitious athletes dropping out of higher education because of their athletic commitments. Results also found the student and athlete role were found to sometimes be conflicting, and athletes often prioritised their sport over educational success. The motivation for athletes to undertake a dual career included security of income for the future, back-up to their athletic career and parental pressures to gain an education.

It is also suggested that in Slovakia, athletes may be facing a negative mind-set towards the dual-career concept by their educational institutions. This may be a challenge to overcome in seeking to put in place dual-career support programs in this country. This was suggested to be due to a lack of knowledge of dual career demands within universities in Slovakia, which leads to some academics being uncertain and unwilling to give student-athletes increased support. The athlete's investment in sport changed over time according to their financial situation, work duties, and educational commitments. This was more likely with the non-professional athletes, who often had to negotiate their athletic careers within limited financial resources. In conclusion, a dual career appeared as a generally manageable process, but some arrangements need to be put in place that enable education or work to be adjusted to practices, camps, and competitions.

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