

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

**HIGH PERFORMANCE ATHLETES` DUAL CAREER
POSSIBILITIES IN LATVIAN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL
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Abstract

This article aims to provide an overview of high performance athletes-students' dual career management opportunities in Latvian higher education institutions. This paper analyzes the scientific literature and high performance athletes' survey results. The authors in the paper explore and analyze the possibilities for high performance athletes to get an education and to improve their training process. This paper provides a theoretical overview and analysis of high performance athletes' survey results in respect of the subject. Analyzing high performance athletes' study process in a higher educational institution the authors conclude that the number of high performance athletes – students in the first two years of study, that is respectively 19-21 years of age, which is the transition period from early youth to youth age group, have problems with carrying out the study plan. Students - athletes make multiple mistakes in the management functions in the study process: time planning, organizing, controlling, lack of motivation. High performance athletes have four important indicators for dual career: the learning environment, the sport environment, the support that they have, athletes' self-contribution in the dual career process. As a result, dual career management guidelines suited to successful management of high performance athletes' dual careers in Latvian higher educational institutions have been worked out.

Key words: *dual career, education, high performance athletes, sport.*

Introduction

In modern society sport has a social, economic and education – promoting role. Sport is an area of human activity that is of particular

interest to European Union citizens and it has a great potential to bring people together, regardless of age and social background. A high level sport is becoming increasingly important, and it contributes to the social role of sport. Sport not only improves health, but also educates, and it plays an important role in social and cultural life, as well as recreation. Social role of sport can strengthen the European Union's external relations (White Paper on Sport, 2007).

Sport is a dynamic and fast growing industry, whose macro – economic impact is underestimated. Economic value of sport is increasingly associated with intellectual property rights. These rights relate to copyright, publicity, trademark, image and media rights of an athlete. In a dynamic industry that is subject to increasing globalization, the intellectual property rights become an underlying factor for a healthy economy. It is important to promote sport meaning in the field of education. The values conveyed through sport help develop knowledge, motivation, skills and perseverance. Time spent in sport activities at schools and higher educational institutions is good for health and education; such benefits should be further encouraged.

To ensure high performance athletes' reintegration into the labor market at the end of their sporting careers, European Athletes as students dual career network (EAS) points out that already at the very beginning particular attention has to be paid to young athletes' dual professional training and there have to be formed high quality local training centers (such as in France - National Sports Institute, expertise and performance, Great Britain - The Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme), that would correspond to athletes' moral, educational and professional interests (EAS, 2013).

Nowadays, education is more important, without it no one can compete in the labor market and in other areas of life as well. Not only is the level of education important, but also the personality characteristics which are developed when educating. An essential role is the individual creativity, the ability to flexibly adapt to any situation, the ability to create new, competitive ideas.

An important initiative of the European Union in the field of sport was to announce the year 2004 as *the European Year of Education through Sport* that aimed at raising awareness of the potentially beneficial links between education and sport, and to introduce young people to the knowledge and skills that are needed not only to develop their physical potential and willingness to participate, but also to promote young people's social skills in a multicultural context (European Year of Education through Sport, 2004).

The transition from a secondary school to a higher educational institution for young people associates with major changes in their personal lives (environmental change, a shift in sport from a young age to the junior age and adult sport) and it often causes additional stress. For athletes it is difficult to shift to adult society, feeling that they are unable to achieve high results in sport, young people often make premature decisions - stop the high performance sport in favor of good education to get a future profession.

This period coincides with Erikson's (1998) human psychological division by life stages. Erikson distinguishes eight life stages, but in this paper the authors analyze only two stages of human development - adolescence (12 - 18 years old and young adulthood (19 - 25 years old).

In Latvia young people from about 16 - 19 years of age learn at a secondary school and from 19 to 25 years of age study at a higher educational institution. In a higher educational institution the problem group is youth in the first two years of study, which corresponds to an average age of 19 - 21 years, as a transitional period, so the authors in the study analyze youth, high performance athletes two age groups (maturity stage).

In the process of high performance athletes' dual careers the environment is important in which high performance athletes - students spend most of the day (lectures, library, laboratories, trainings, competitions, etc.). In formation of dual careers we are faced with educational and sport environments as well as with social environment which is closely related to the two previous ones. In this study, the authors mainly focus on the educational and sport environments.

In society (especially for children, young people) high performance athletes are often seen as idols, whom resemble to. Thus the athlete's behavior and attitude is an example of how to live in harmony with the surrounding environment (e.g. do not pollute the surroundings, use of ecological detergents, etc.). The society has an equally significant interaction between the natural environment, the physical and psychological environment. The sport environment can be compared to the learning environment, just with different conditions, because in training process as well as in competition process teaching and learning takes place. In dual career it is important - how high performance athletes are able to make the transition from educational environment into the sport environment, identifying common factors in the interaction.

Material and methods

The aim of the article is to study and analyze high performance athletes' dual career possibilities in Latvian higher educational institutions.

The study used a qualitative method – analysis of scientific literature and a quantitative method – 319 surveys of Latvia's high performance athletes aged between 16 and 33 years.

High performance athletes are athletes who are included in the Latvian national or junior team, athletes who participate in the higher division national championships (Ābeļkalns, 2012).

Dual career (in English) – dual/double career. Duale Karriere (in German) – a dual career in German means a career connecting two main areas – especially for young people – high performance athletes to successfully combine obtaining of education and sport career development (Forster, 2010).

Kaksoisura (Finnish) – (opiskelun ja urheilun yhdistäminen) in English combination of studies and competitive sport (Keskitalo, 2012).

"Dual career" is a career with two main activities (e.g. sport and education). For student – athlete "dual career" in a higher educational institution means that in a certain period of time a person connects sport with studies at school, leading to high achievement in sport and acquired academic education (Uebel, 2006).

While Stambulova (2010) explains that "dual career" is coordinated action process in which an athlete develops his athletic and academic competence, contributes to psychosocial and psychological development (Stambulova, 2010).

In order to successfully develop high performance athletes' dual career, the authors analyze the educational and sport environment. To better understand high performance athletes' education and sport career formation processes, it is necessary to analyze the environment in which students - athletes develop their competencies. Nowadays, the environment and the educational environment are defined from different aspects.

Environment – are all the conditions and factors both living and non-living, which affect the body, or even a body system throughout its life, or existence. The term "environment" can be extended to the whole area and the specific aspects of it. Content of the concept is formed of: nature environment, human modified environment, social environment, human internal environment.

Paik and Selby describing the environmental concept, name four interrelated elements that make it up:

- Nature environment – all the wildlife, bio-regulatory mechanisms, animals and plants;

- Human built environment – infrastructure, buildings, transport, communications, houses, schools, stadiums, public buildings, structures and roads;

- Social environment – the relationship between persons in group or in the country, as well as relationships between the countries;

- Internal environment – the human as a personality physical, mental, emotional and intellectual level of orderliness and balance (Paiks, Selbijs, 1996).

The learning environment is an environment where children, pupils, students purposefully create their own experience, values, skills, knowledge and attitudes towards themselves and the world around them. Describing learning environment it is necessary to take into account three generalized pillars: matter environment, mental conditions and human resources (Ivanova, Žogla, 2011).

The learning environment is as purposefully organized situation where pupils, teachers, students and lecturers, make up their own experience, values, skills, knowledge and attitudes towards themselves, others and the world around them.

Ivanova and Žogla (2011) emphasize that there is purposefulness in organizing the learning environment, in the case of environment in educational institution, but there are also random learning situations that are deliberately organized, but which specific features allow the individual to learn new or re-evaluate existing knowledge, skills, competences and values (Ivanova, Žogla, 2011).

Sport environment is characterized as macro environment as an essential factor in socialization process of the personality. That includes: society – its economic, political, cultural, climatic, ecological, geographical and sanitary environment and the factors that directly interact with the personality in its life time, a certain set of social conditions – social, material and spiritual – that in one way or another affect the formation and development of personality. Particularly important are social issues, welfare, customs and traditions in certain part of the society. The second, no less influential environmental factor is the microenvironment. It is related to athlete's daily activities surrounding social environment. The greatest impact of the microenvironment traditionally is provided by family, family education, childhood experience, peers, friends, school environment and the media. In high performance athlete's personal growth also is essential influence of a coach, sport school, sport club, team members, sport federation, judges and supporters, which generally drives athlete's actions, respecting athlete's needs, interests, abilities and opportunities. Trainings

and competitions need to create an environment where all young people are given the opportunity: to fully realize their abilities and skills in accordingly organized trainings and competitions; to enjoy movement activities in a positive emotional environment; to train without injury and excessively long physical and mental load; to be right, good, with a positive evaluation and self-esteem, even if victory or records are not achieved; to train individualized according to personal growth and development characteristics; to train at competent coaches with high sport ethical principles, norms and personal value priorities that are set out in Sport ethics and coach ethics codes; simply to be young and enjoy a full and comprehensive life (Masteralexis, Barr, Hums, 2005).

On the basis of the above mentioned statements, the authors define sport environment as purposefully organized environment where high performance athletes build their own experience, values, skills, achievements, knowledge and attitudes towards themselves and the world around them.

When organizing high performance athletes' dual career process, it is essential to understand psychological traits of the student – athletes' age group.

17 – 20 years old young people start to think seriously about their place in life and career choices. For them peer group still remains important, but a lot more young people start to show their individuality. At this age, young people intensely assert themselves, systematically trying to create and invent something new; work in all possible directions and areas. Young people in this age group like to talk about life; they philosophize, reason and look for the meaning of life. It is important that young people know what they succeed in and what they like, it helps to choose a future profession. While the previous age group youngsters willingly take to do something voluntarily, then at this age they ponder what this action will bring – young people everywhere are looking for the benefits (Ieteikumi darbam ar jauniešiem, 2011).

20 – 25 years old people know what they want and know how to accomplish it, or at least they know whom to ask how to do it. This is the time when young people engage in student life, they form serious relationships; it is an independent start in life. It is a very good time for starting a business. It becomes important to receive reward for their work, or at least see these perspectives. At this age, young people participate in activities in pairs; the company has become less important (Ieteikumi darbam ar jauniešiem, 2011).

Šmitiņa (2011) points out that 57% of students who interrupt studies are 18 – 20 years old and they have started studying immediately or very shortly after secondary education (this is the largest age group in the first year of studies as a whole). As age increases, this number decreases – studies at the age of 21-23 stops 32.6% of students, 24 – 26 years of age group contains only 5.7% of all students who interrupted their studies. This can be explained by an age distribution in the first year, however, it should also be noted that it is possible for older students to select studies more deliberate and purposefully, so they are more motivated to continue ongoing education (Šmitiņa, 2011).

In the introduction of the article it has been written about the high performance athletes' problems that arise in the transition from secondary school to a higher educational institution, it is a big change in one's personal life (environmental change, a shift in sport from a young age to the junior age and adult sport) that often leads to additional stress for athletes, this fact is also confirmed by several researchers in their works - Petitapas et al (1997); Engström (2011).

In a number of world and European countries (USA, Australia, New Zealand, UK, France, etc.) there are high performance athlete support programs dealing with formation of high performance athletes dual careers. These support organizations organize athletes - students support in their life-skills development, combining a career in sport with obtaining an education.

Analyzing the experience of the world's countries in high performance athletes – students' dual career management, the question arises: what and how to manage a high performance athletes' dual career process in Latvian higher educational institutions.

Results

In order to achieve the objective of the research there were interviewed high performance athletes on issues related to dual career: what support they receive and what would be required for athletes in learning process and sport improvement. Respondents were given statements about learning and sport, as well as four multiple choice in Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and completely disagree, of which one had to choose the most appropriate answer. The data were processed by SPSS program.

Based on an analysis of theoretical knowledge (Petitapas et al, 1997; Eriksons, 1998; Engström, 2011; Šmitiņa, 2011) the authors divided all respondents into two age groups – young people under 19 years of age (n – 125) and young people from 20 years of age and older (n – 194), which also

coincides with studies in a secondary school and studies in a higher educational institution.

There were surveyed high performance athletes who participate in the Olympic Games, World Championships and European Championships, various kinds of international competitions and are the Latvian championship prize winners.

In order to determine the differences in the views between the two age groups of athletes there was conducted t-test. This analysis allows drawing conclusions about the dual career development opportunities in higher educational institutions.

As table 1 shows, for young people – high performance athletes under 19 years of age it is more important to prove themselves in sport and to their friends ($p < 0.01$), and they are not sure that they can achieve higher average marks in some subjects. The fact that for younger athletes it is more important to learn in a particular school to be able to combine studies and high performance sport ($p < 0.01$), the authors explained by the fact that most of this group of young people were enrolled in specialized sport classes or schools.

Young people – high performance athletes when getting older, begin to pay more attention to education in order to secure their future after the sport career. This means that young people over 20 years of age choose studies more for their future interests, which results in showing a greater interest in the subjects which are acquired ($p > 0.001$). Young people in this age group more often participate in high – level competitions ($p < 0.001$), as well as participate in training camps outside the country. It is important for them to know what has to be acquired in study courses ($p < 0.01$) in order to participate in the learning process using e-learning and study on an individual learning plan when they are outside the educational institution ($p < 0.001$) which in the high performance athletes' point of view is very importance when linking education with high performance sport.

Comparing the responses of the two groups of young people it can be concluded that after 20 years of age, young people more carefully plan their time and devote it more to their learning process. At this age, young people begin to develop independent relationships with the opposite sex partners, establish a family, as a result of which they often change their attitude toward life and the people around them. The fact that older young people spend a lot of time at the computer ($p < 0.015$), the authors explain by the fact that in today's interactive era the computer is used in the study process and in communication with close people.

In the next block of questionnaire there were analyzed high performance athletes' responses about support for education and sport. In the process of the work, the authors recognize that young people under 19 years of age receive more support in education from their coach than young people over 20 years of age ($p < 0.001$). In sport at the secondary school age athletes are more supported by a coach ($p < 0.001$), parents ($p < 0.014$) and teachers ($p < 0.04$). (Tab. 1)

Table 1

High performance athletes' views on sport and education

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Athletes to 19 years (M) *</i>	<i>Athletes 20 years of age and older (M) *</i>	<i>p-value</i>
I have some doubts as to obtain a higher average grade in certain subjects.	2,77	2,49	0,01
I have a greater satisfaction to win the competition than to get score "10" in a particular subject.	3,43	3,19	0,004
I am willing to devote more time to reach higher achievements in sport.	3,73	3,57	0,01
It is important for me to learn skills and abilities from my coach.	3,56	3,39	0,01
I spend a lot of time with friends.	2,57	2,38	0,014
It is important for me to know what has to be acquired in courses.	3,14	3,38	0,01
The knowledge that I get in the courses, I will be able to use in various aspects of life outside the school.	3,08	3,28	0,05
I am interested in most of the study program courses.	2,53	2,91	0,001
I have a possibility to use e-learning in learning process.	2,20	2,84	0,001
I have an opportunity to learn after the individual plan.	1,98	2,47	0,001
I take part in designing of my training plan	2,27	2,86	0,001
I often participate in high-level competitions.	2,74	3,16	0,001
I go in for high performance sport, because so I can earn money.	2,18	2,53	0,001
I always plan my time.	2,73	3,07	0,001
I spend a lot of time with my family.	2,33	2,59	0,001
I spend a lot of time moving from school to training base.	2,16	2,54	0,001
I spend a lot of time at the computer.	2,25	2,44	0,015

*Four-point Likert scale average values

Whereas young people over the age of 20 the main support in sport receive from the agent ($p < 0.001$). High performance athletes in their responses noted that both in education and in sport they receive some support from the sponsors ($p < 0.004$) and the Latvian Olympic Team (LOV) ($p < 0.001$).

High performance athletes were asked to select the type of support – financial, advisory and moral or any other that would be more necessary in the development of their dual career. Data analysis showed that all athletes need financial support, in particular, the higher the athletic achievements, the greater the financial support needed. Young people older than 20 years of age stress the need for a consultative, organizational support in organizing dual career.

The authors believe that it is important to clarify the relationship between the beneficiaries high performance athletes receive and what support they would need. Data analysis showed that high performance athletes receive the greatest support in education and sport from parents, teachers/lecturers and schools. The biggest difference between the amount of received and the desired support is from the agent, consultant and psychologist. The support from those persons in athletes' perspective is insufficient.

Studying the experience of foreign researchers in dual career forming process and taking into account the athletes' need for consultant support in organizational issues, the authors conclude that in Latvia in dual career forming process there should be involved a dual career manager, a person who advises, helps to organize high performance athletes' dual careers. Working with young people it is important to find out what they want at the moment, and give a possibility to achieve it. Often for parents it is hard to perceive young people's errors and first falls. It is good, if there is a neutral adult (dual career manager) who will not evaluate, condemn, will not scold, but will simply be side by side, and the young person will know that he can talk to or ask advice. Sense of humor and joking is very important. Young people, especially younger ones, severely perceive peer rating, criticism and remarks; their self-esteem is fragile and dependent on others. By learning how to turn the situation into a joke, to laugh at the situation and, most importantly, at themselves, young people become stronger, freer, more creative.

Analyzing the facts about high performance athletes' dual career possible development the educational and sport environment is important. The athletes' survey shows that there is a strong correlation between education and sport environment in a number of components – technically

assured ($r \geq 0.92$), corresponding to individual needs ($r \geq 0.97$), motivating ($r \geq 1.0$) and entertaining environment ($r \geq 0.98$), which is important to be able to successfully organize high performance athletes dual career.

Athletes (81.3%) note that it is important that study and sport environment is appropriate for an individual's requirements, but in the real situation in Latvia several sport facilities do not meet the needs of high performance athletes, especially dissatisfied are track and field athletes (91.3%).

Discussion

Results of this study coincide with the findings of several authors on the typical criteria in formation process of dual career. We must agree with several authors' (Petitapas et al, 1997; Eriksons, 1998; Engström, 2011; Šmitiņa, 2011) research on young people's life stages psychological groupings in age groups till 19 years of age and from 20 years of age and older. During the research, the authors divided all respondents into three age groups: up to 19 years of age, from 20 – 23 years of age and older than 24 years of age. In an analysis it was found that between the second and third age groups there is no statistically significant difference, so in further study, the authors combined the second and the third age group. It should be noted that in the course of the research it was confirmed that young people under the age of 19 communicate with friends more ($p < 0.014$), but getting older priorities change – young people are starting to listen more to professors, coaches and family advice. In high performance athletes dual career formation process acute phase is exactly the transition from secondary school to a higher educational institution, which is marked on a scale of age 19 – 20 years.

As this study confirmed, an important role in athletes dual career development has qualitative educational and sport environment interactions, technically assured ($r \geq 0.92$), corresponding to individual needs ($r \geq 0.97$), motivating ($r \geq 1.0$) and entertaining environment ($r \geq 0.98$), these statements also comply with a number of scientists' (Paiks, Selbijs, 1996; Masteralexis, Barr, Hums, 2005; Ivanova, Žogla, 2011) theories.

Researching the experience of the world countries' high performance athletes' dual career development process, the authors find that athlete support centers in a number of countries are running successfully (e.g. France, UK, Australia, USA, etc.) (Engström, 2011; EAS, 2013). Analyzing athletes' questionnaires the authors conclude that for young people especially during this transition period it is necessary to have support from organizational consultant in order to achieve their objectives in education

and sport without any stress. Analyzing foreign high performance athletes' support center work organization we are faced with an advisor, mentor and coach who within the organization are trying to support athletes in their dual career. So far, in Latvia there are only few studies on high performance athletes' dual career and the associated processes (e.g. Grants, 2011; Абелькалнс, 2012; Fernate, 2013).

Summarizing the assumptions the authors propose to introduce in higher educational institutions of Latvia high performance athletes' dual career managerial system including consultant - mentor and coach competencies.

Conclusions

In the course of the work, researching and analyzing scientific literature on dual career support opportunities in education and sport the authors conclude that young people from the age group 19 to 20 years of age are in the transition period from youth to maturity age group; that this period coincides with the transition from a secondary school to a higher educational institution; as well as there is a change in sport from youth group to the junior/adult group. This theory is confirmed in the study because the high performance athlete survey analysis shows statistically significant correlations between the two age groups.

17 – 19 years old people start to think seriously about their place in life and career choices. For them peer group still remains important, but a lot more young people start to show their individuality. 20 – 25 years old people know what they want and know how to accomplish it, or at least they know whom to ask how to do it. This is the time when young people engage in student life, they form serious relationships; it is an independent start in life.

In order to successfully accomplish the dual career process, for high performance athletes is important the environment in which they learn and the environment, where the training and sport competitions take place. Athletes recognize that it is easier to achieve the objectives of education and sport, if the educational and sport environment interact.

Data analysis showed that the high performance athletes receive strongest support in education and sport from parents, teachers/lecturers and schools. The biggest difference between the amount of received and desired support is from the agent, consultant and psychologist.

Taking into consideration all previously mentioned facts, it is concluded that high performance athletes need support mainly when beginning studies in 1st and 2nd year. Taking into account the experience of

the world's countries in athletes dual-career organization, the authors conclude that in Latvian higher educational institutions the best way to develop a dual career, is the introduction of a dual career manager in high performance athlete learning and sport management process.

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