



Is it possible to combine professional football and higher education after the age of 18?

Neus Ramos-Agost^{1,2,3*} , Anna Jordana^{1,2}   & Miquel Torregrossa^{1,2}  

¹ Department of Basic, Developmental and Educational Psychology, Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain).

² Institute for Sports Research, Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain).

³ Villarreal Club de Fútbol, Vila-real (Spain).



Cite this article

Ramos-Agost, N., Jordana, A. & Torregrossa, M. (2024). Is it possible to combine professional football and higher education after the age of 18? *Apunts Educación Física y Deportes*, 156, 1-9. [https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.\(2024/2\).156.01](https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.(2024/2).156.01)

Edited by:

© Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de la Presidència
Institut Nacional d'Educació
Física de Catalunya (INEFC)

ISSN: 2014-0983

*Corresponding author:

Neus Ramos-Agost
neus.ramosa@autonoma.cat

Section:

Physical Activity and Health

Original language:

Catalan

Received:

July 18, 2023

Accepted:

November 7, 2023

Published:

April 1, 2024

Front cover:

Mountain biker enjoying
nature and open air.
© Adobe Stock. Delcio F/
peopleimages.com

Abstract

The aim of this phenomenological and instrumental case study was to explore the combination of high-performance football and higher education at senior level. In order to go deeper into this topic, which is part of the research on dual careers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 male student-football players between 18 and 19 years of age from the lower categories of a Primera División (Spanish Premier League) club. The data have been analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The results showed that student-football players can pursue a higher dual career: (a) if they identify the challenges they have to face and have the necessary skills and resources; (b) if the people around them accompany them in a way that suits their lifestyle; and (c) if the club promotes a culture that fosters a higher dual career and their mental health. The study also highlights some aspects not foreseen in the sample studied that should be incorporated into the implementation of the dual higher education career, such as a more individualised and flexible approach to cases, adapting each case to the specific circumstances.

Keywords: dual career, elite sport, football, higher education, mental health, senior.

Introduction

Dual career (DC) is the act of combining sport with studies or work (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). The benefits of following it include, among others, more positive identity development and improved emotional stability, and it fosters both intellectual stimulation and socialising (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). As the studies of Pallares et al. (2011) and Torregrossa et al. (2015), began to show, the complementarity of sport and studies can work as prevention work so that athletes can have alternatives while they are pursuing their sporting career and when they finish it. Within the Career Path Models (CPM; Perez-Rivases et al., 2017; Torregrossa et al., 2021), we can observe the four career paths that are proposed in relation to the combination of sport and studies/work: (a) a linear path, where athletes focus exclusively on sport, (b) a divergent path, where sport and studies/work are seen as separate and in conflict, (c) a convergent path, where sport and studies/work complement each other, and (d) a parallel path, where sport and studies/work are seen as separate but do not converge. McGuine et al. (2021) indicate that, as the level of both sport and education increases, combining sport and studies can become an increasingly complex challenge.

In the case of football, which is considered the most popular and mediatised sport in the world (Samuel et al., 2017), some authors such as Jordana et al. (2022) point out that football players are beginning to have doubts about the path they have to choose during the transition from junior to senior (TJS), based on their beliefs. In this sense, when they start to become aware that they may become professional football players, their satisfaction with academic performance is significantly lower (Jornada et al., 2022; Torregrossa et al., 2021). Apart from this, in relation to the possibility of being able to pursue football in the future, statistical data shows that less than 10% of football players progress from junior to senior level and go on to become professionals (Dugdale et al., 2021). For this reason, this data suggests the need to develop a DC (Torregrossa et al., 2020) that facilitates the simultaneous development of an academic and sporting career. In this line, once past the TJS, when young and talented football players face a variety of challenges, if they do not have alternatives and remain dedicated to other areas of their lives (e.g. academic and personal; Chamorro et al., 2016), as argued in the systematic review by Kegelaers et al. (2022), they will be closer to having problems with their mental health (MH).

From the perspective of promoting DC in order to prevent MH problems, research such as that of Stambulova et al. (2015) and Schinke et al. (2018) have also stated that developing a DC tailored to the needs of student-athletes is a key resource that helps them to achieve sporting and

educational goals, live a fulfilling life, and maintain health and well-being. However, Åkesdotter et al. (2020) found that the time of greatest commitment to combining sport and studies often coincides with the period of increasing problems of MH. Studies such as Brown et al. (2019) have also highlighted that student-athletes' emotional regulation may be impaired when trying to cope with the stressors they experience not only in the sport context (e.g., performance pressure, injuries, call-up problems), but also in the other contexts of their lives (e.g., educational, psychological, social, financial, and legal; Wylleman et al., 2020). Therefore, although we have argued that there are benefits to complementing sport and studies, the combination and demands of the different spheres of a football player's life place a number of demands (Sullivan et al., 2020) that may increase the likelihood of MH problems and early withdrawal from sport or studies (NCAA Sport Science Institute, 2016).

In order for football players to be able to perform DC under optimal conditions, some studies such as those by Defruyt et al. (2019) and Storm et al. (2021) stress that organisations and the people around them have a key role to play in helping them develop a favourable match. Similarly, other work emphasises the need to identify the specific challenges and protective factors that the environment could provide for student-athletes to develop healthy DC (e.g. Prieto-Ayuso, 2008; Kuttel & Larsen, 2020; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

The Model of Dual Career Development Environments (MDCDE) by Henriksen et al. (2020) seeks to emphasise this role of the environment through the full inclusion of the student-athlete. Following this model, in the framework of a sport or academic institution that promotes the combination of sport with studies, the environment is structured as follows: the student-athlete occupies a central position surrounded by micro and macro levels, in which there is an interaction of three spheres—sport, academic and private—that are subject to the temporal dimensions of present, past, and future (Mejías et al., 2021).

Some authors show that DC environments vary considerably depending on the structure and organisation of geographic areas or states (e.g. Morris et al., 2021). However, it is worth noting that at the micro-level of football players (e.g. club, residence and academic programme), no study has explored, within a specific and delimited population, the resources and support structures of DC (Storm et al., 2021). The role of the people who help them to develop it has also not been analysed in detail (Defruyt et al., 2019). Moreover, most of the studies conducted so far on the reconciliation of sport and studies have focused on lower levels of sport or academics (e.g. Stambulova et al., 2020).

The present study goes a step further to find out how the 10% of football players who do go on to become professionals (Dugdale et al., 2021; Jordana et al., 2022) can develop an adaptive dual career at senior level. Therefore, the aim of this article was to explore the combination of high-performance football and higher education at senior level. Specifically, we provide the analysis of making high performance compatible with non-compulsory higher education (e.g. the last stage of the baccalaureate and university) in a male population. We will use the term “higher dual career” (HDC) to indicate this type of collation.

Methodology

Description of the context, participants, and selection criteria

The study focused on the environment of Villarreal C.F., a private club (CDPr; Mejías et al., 2021) with professional men’s and women’s teams at the highest levels of Spanish football. The club has a Psychology Department, which is in charge of the emotional well-being of the player; a Studies Department, which takes care of the class schedules and the academic reinforcements that the player needs; and a Residence Department, which is in charge of planning and organising the different tasks that they have on a daily basis, together with the technical staff. All three hold meetings on an ongoing basis to maintain the occupation and comprehensive care of the student-athlete.

The participants were seven male student-football players of Villarreal C.F. belonging to amateur B and amateur C. All were interviewed after the end of the 2020-2021 season. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the participants in order to avoid confidentiality.

The selection criteria were: (a) being in the age range of 18 to 20 years; (b) having passed compulsory education and being in possession of a high school, higher education

or university diploma (post-compulsory education); and (c) having been in the club for more than three years to be able to assess the support they have received, and to get to know their culture and customs.

Design

The study is phenomenological and instrumental single-case (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). In other words, it has focused on analysing the actions that an organisation has taken in recent years through the meaning given by the participants in enabling the development of a HDC. The study by Smith and Sparkes (2017) states that in this type of qualitative studies the most relevant thing is not the statistical representativeness, but the opportunity to observe in detail how the selected people experience the world. In this regard, the study states that the number of interviews will depend on how much, and what, you need to know about the interviewees. Therefore, Smith and Sparkes (2017) explain that the sample size needs to be small enough to have the necessary material, and large enough to provide a new, rich and structured understanding of the experience.

This design is the same as that used in the case study by Hodge et al. (2014), which is included within the interpretative paradigm and which recognises the researcher as a reflexive instrument. The interpretation of the interviewer, the first signatory of this article, is relevant, as she is a psychologist at the club and, together with the co-authors, has discussed the issues at stake.

A purposive sampling system was used to select information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). In order to get an overview of the club, and also as explained by Smith and Sparkes (2017) for this type of phenomenological study, seven interviews were considered sufficient to reach information saturation. In addition, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used (Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive characteristics of the participants interviewed who perform the HDC.

Participants	Sporting level	Academic level	Club years	Age
Ximo	1. ^a RFEF	1st university year	4	19
Joan	1. ^a RFEF	Baccalaureate and university entrance exams passed	4	19
Jordi	1. ^a RFEF	Baccalaureate and university entrance exams passed	3	19
Gerard	1. ^a RFEF	Completed higher grade and enrolled in another program	4	18
Pau	1. ^a RFEF	2 subjects missing to obtain the baccalaureate	8	18
Vincent	3. ^a división	1st university year	5	18
Jaume	3. ^a división	2 subjects missing to complete the baccalaureate and enrolled to pursue higher education	5	19

Measures

Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview script was designed taking into consideration, on the one hand, research included in the DC theoretical framework (e.g. Torregrossa et al., 2020) and, on the other hand, a script provided by the GEPE group (UAB) and used in the study by Jordana et al. (2019). The main themes included were: (a) the challenges presented and the perceived assistance needed by student-football players in the sporting, academic and personal areas; (b) the exploration of other spheres of the holistic model (e.g. economic and legal management); and (c) club culture.

Procedure

This study is part of the HeDuCa project and has been approved by the Commission of Ethics in Animal and Human Experimentation (CEEAH) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain) with reference number CEEAH 4996 and is titled "Promotion of Healthy Dual Careers in sport, HeDuCa" Initially, the coordination of the Psychology Department of Villarreal C.F. was contacted to choose the seven participants. In order to maintain confidentiality, avoid minimising hierarchical dependency, and increase the validity of the data, only the interviewer knew which players would participate (World Medical Association, 2013).

The seven interviews were conducted on four different days. They lasted between 40 and 50 minutes and were carried out individually. They were made and recorded by the Zoom.us platform and transcribed with Verbatim. At the end of the study, the results were presented to the Villarreal C.F. Psychology Department.

Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was carried out following Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflective thematic analysis (RTA) approach, using an inductive-deductive approach, from descriptive quotations to the elaboration of themes. This approach allows for the introduction of new terms based on the elaboration of a summary of the information obtained. This procedure consists of six phases: (a) reading and familiarisation; (b) creation of codes in a systematic way; (c) identification and grouping of themes; (d) review of extracted themes and codes; (e) definition and naming of themes; and (f) drafting of the article by choosing the quotes that best summarise the themes. Data analysis was carried out by analysing the interviews individually and as a whole. Based on the transcription of the interviews, in order to analyse the data, an Excel and a Word document were used to create the different versions of the tables (Table 2, 3, and 4). In order to make these tables concrete, questions were critically posed following the steps of RTA. The questions were oriented towards what was intended to be done in this research, how and why. The 6 phases of Braun and Clarke's (2022) study explained above were then

applied. The most time was spent on data familiarisation, which involves getting to know the data in depth and supplementing it with notes from the analysis. With regard to coding, an attempt was made to capture repetitions of meanings in an exhaustive manner in order to make the codes more concrete and to avoid overlapping. With regard to the identification of the themes, different schemes and tables were created in order to group the initial codes and generate the most relevant themes for the study. At this point, we found that there were themes subordinate to the main theme that focused on a particular aspect of the main theme. Therefore, sub-themes were also specified (see tables 2, 3 and 4). Finally, the different topics were discussed with the authors of the article and the final name of each topic was agreed upon.

Results

The presentation of the results takes into account the Model of Dual Career Developmental Environments (MEDCD; Henriksen et al., 2020): (a) table 2 corresponds to the individual level and includes the theme challenges and the subthemes management of non-normative transitions and locus of control, flexibility and adaptability, availability of means, organisation and planning, and coping with demands in stressful situations; (b) table 3 corresponds to the micro level and includes the theme accompaniment of collectives and the sub-themes management of competitiveness, emotional validation and HDC support, management of transitions and trust, organisation and planning, understanding and adaptation to HDC, social support and emotional availability; and (c) table 4 corresponds to the macro level and includes the theme culture of the sport environment and the sub-themes self-awareness, self-regulation, compassion, identity and commitment.

Challenges

Table 2 is a summary of how the theme challenges has been derived from: (a) the codes, which describe the challenges that the student-football players have to face in their HDC; and (b) the sub-themes, which correspond to the actions and competences that need the help of the club in order to face them.

In terms of injuries, they explained that it helps them if the club provides them with resources and tools to manage this type of non-normative transition (i.e. events with low predictability and not occurring within a set plan). In this sense, it would be necessary to enhance learning in the management of setbacks in sport in order to redirect the focus to other areas. With regard to timetables, transport, and facilities, it helps them to have these resources adapted to them and to be able to feel this flexibility on the part of

the environment. However, they would need to take more account of individual differences and better tailor resources to different profiles of people. Finally, they consider it necessary to be able to rely on organisation and planning with realistic goals during their daily routine (e.g. training, physical preparation, and study), as well as to receive attention and adaptation when they have assessment tests (e.g. sports competitions and exams).

Accompaniment of the collectives

Table 3 shows how the theme of accompanying groups has been defined on the basis of: (a) the codes, which describe the aspects that the accompanying groups must take into account in their HDC; and (b) the sub-themes, which correspond to the competences that these groups must have in order to accompany the student-football players and facilitate the matching.

The main responsibility for conflict resolution lies with the coaching staff and psychologists. They need emotional validation, support, understanding, and adaptation to the HDC from the most important groups in their environment: team, technical staff, psychologists, residence tutors, teachers, family, partners, and friends. The participants of this study consider that the care of these groups helps them a lot if they take into account the individual differences of each one. Psychological specialists are also often the ones who accompany them in managing transitions and provide them with the confidence and tools to face challenges while taking care of their mental health. The competences related to organisational management and planning, above all, belong to the tutors and teachers in residence and to the psychologists, who are in charge of helping to communicate the tasks and needs presented by the student-football players to the rest of the professionals and family members. Finally, they consider the role of families and couples to be fundamental.

Table 2

Footballers-students' perceptions of the challenges they face and the resources they need during their HDC.

Descriptive quotes from student-athletes	Codes	Sub-themes
"When you are injured, it is very difficult to have courage"; "Psychologists teach you to have other objectives"; "Being dedicated to your studies helps you to see that there are other things apart from football."	Injuries	Non-normative transitions and locus of control management
"If we don't have everything planned and organised in advance, we have the worry of lack of time and it causes us stress"; "I have managed to get everything done because of the conditions we have."	Timetables	Flexibility and adaptability
"Having all these resources helps us to combine everything"; "For those of us who are not in residence, it would be good to have classrooms where we can advance our work when we have free time."	Transport and facilities	Availability of means
"The organisation, planning and understanding of everyone is the key"; "The timetable they provide us with and the techniques they give us psychologists help us to be able to follow through with the objectives."	Daily routine	Organisation and planning
"Not knowing how to combine everything can cause us stress and make us want to give it up, especially studies"; "Not being penalised by changes in timetables is what helps us most to be able to do the DC."	Evaluation tests	Adaptation of demands in stressful situations

Table 3

Perception that student-football players have of the support they should receive from the people around them in order to be able to cope with the HDC.

Descriptive quotes from student-football players	Codes	Sub-themes
"The higher the category, the more complicated it is to manage competitiveness and we need help"; "Learning to see colleagues as people who can help us."	Conflicts	Competitiveness management
"We need people who are empathetic"; "Who understand that each person is different and has different needs"; "Who can adapt their schedules and give us energy."	Diversity	Emotional validation and HDC support
"Psychologists are the people who give you the most confidence and support in any situation"; "We need them to teach us not to depend only on football to be able to be well."	Mental Health	Transition management and trust
"In the residence you have everything, it's amazing all the facilities they give you"; "The tutors also have contact with the relatives, and that gives the parents a lot of peace of mind."	Resources and contact	Organisation and planning
"Even if you are unmotivated and tired, they help you and you end up doing everything"; "They help you feel better and make you change your mind."	Attention	Understanding and adapting to the HDC
"If we have their support, we feel less pressure"; "Problems in our environment affect our HDC"; "The communication they have with the psychologists at the club helps a lot."	Interaction and communication	Social support and emotional availability

Table 4
Footballers-students' perceptions of the culture that a club should have in order to facilitate HDC.

Descriptive quotes from student-football players	Codes	Sub-themes
"The talks we have given have helped us to be aware and prevent catastrophes"; "These spaces help us to relativise our demands."	Lifestyle	Self-awareness
"We need tools to manage money because otherwise we lose our heads"; "We could work a bit more on managing our emotions and thoughts for the lifestyle we have."	Demand management	Self-regulation
"We value what we have more when we see how people without resources and with disabilities are happy to see us"; "We empathise and learn about life thanks to Endavant"; "We get out of our bubble."	Awareness of different realities	Compassion
"At the club they always tell us that we have to study because you never know what can happen to you"; "They tell us that before being football players, we are people and we have a life beyond football."	Establishing values	Identity and commitment

Culture of the sporting environment

Table 4 is a summary of how the theme culture of the sporting environment has been derived from: (a) the codes, which describe the aspects that clubs should take into account to foster the HDC of student-football players; and (b) the sub-themes, which correspond to the competences and values that should be worked on within the club in order to provide them with the necessary resources and to foster their MH.

On the one hand, the student-football players receive advice from the club through a series of talks (e.g. gambling, social networks, sexuality, nutritional aspects, independence) and workshops (e.g. economics, use of mobile phones, study techniques, mindfulness) that help them acquire skills related to self-awareness and self-regulation. On the other hand, from the establishment of a specific methodology and programmes such as *Endavant Igualtat* (a Corporate Social Responsibility programme with the aim of getting players to carry out activities of coexistence and collaboration with other social groups so that they can experience other ways of living different from their own reality), the club promotes a series of values related mainly to compassion, identity, commitment, equality, and responsibility. They perceive this club philosophy as helping them to establish values that foster HDC. In addition, *Endavant Igualtat* helps them to reflect on individual differences, limitations, and capabilities of human beings. However, because of their lifestyle, they report that they would need more resources related to administrative and emotional management on an individual level.

Discussion

The participants in this article are among the 10% of football players who become professionals at senior level (Dugdale et al., 2021), and the results indicate that the club and the people around them help them to follow a

convergent trajectory (Torregrossa et al., 2021), i.e. they facilitate them to pursue higher education at the same time. Authors such as Jordana et al. (2022) and Torregrossa et al. (2021) have studied that athletes in the TJS who believe they will become football professionals tend to choose a linear trajectory and therefore end up dropping out of school. However, the results of this study show that student-football players can develop HDC provided they have an environment in which there are conditions adapted to their needs.

Schinke et al. (2018) explain that developing an student-athlete's combination of sport and studies helps to achieve goals not only in these areas (sport and academics), but also in all other areas of their lives (e.g. psychological and social). However, their emotional well-being may be impaired when they try to cope with the challenges they present during their HDC (Brown et al., 2019). This could also increase the risk of dropping out of school and in the long run would not be conducive to their MH. Along the same lines as Kuettel and Larsen (2020), the participants explain that in order to be able to combine top-level sport with higher education, it is important that the club helps them to identify the challenges that may arise. Above all, they need to be provided with resources based on adapted and flexible organisation and planning. However, it must be emphasised that student-football players perceive that they have a demanding lifestyle and that it would be necessary for the club to provide them with more resources to be able to develop a more fulfilling HDC with the consideration of preserving their MH. For example, they suggest the incorporation of more study rooms, break rooms and training based on the management of attentional foci. As stated by Torregrossa et al. (2021), the adapted resources provided by the environment can act as a protective factor. Therefore, if student-football players are provided with support services and adapted

conditions (Storm et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2019) within this level of demand (McGuine et al., 2021) and, above all, for the age at which they are (Åkesdotter et al., 2020), they will be further away from presenting problems of emotional dysregulation (Kegelaers et al., 2022).

Considering the micro-level of the student-athlete (Henriksen et al., 2020), the results also suggest that people in the student-athletes' environment play a crucial role in the development of HDC (Defruyt et al., 2019). They need these people to have specific competences (e.g. competences in emotional validation, understanding and adaptation). At the same time, as suggested by Wylleman et al. (2017), the student-football players consider it important that, above all, psychologists help them to acquire the skills they need for a healthy combination (e.g. organisation and planning). They also believe that the relationship they have with families and partners is essential for the social support they need. These results are in line with those of Hurley et al. (2020), where they explain that the families and partners of student-athletes play a key role not only in helping them to combine sport with their studies, but also in their emotional well-being. As points to be strengthened, participants consider that receiving more individual sessions with the psychology specialists would help them with the management of their HDC. These results, which are in line with other research on student-athletes (Hong & Coffe, 2017; Orozco et al., 2018), lead us to believe that if the people around the student-athletes put certain skills into practice and transfer them, they can help to a large extent to safeguard the HDC of the student-athletes and, above all, to promote their MH (Defruyt et al., 2019).

In relation to the emotional well-being of the student-football players and the macro level of the student-athlete (Henriksen et al., 2020), the results also indicate that the talks and workshops organised by the club help them to acquire skills and values (e.g. self-awareness, self-regulation, compassion, commitment, and identity) that make it easier for them to cope with their demanding lifestyle (Jordana et al., 2022). However, participants felt that, above all, receiving individual sessions based on realistic goal setting and emotional regulation would help them to function better. Along the same lines as the results of Wylleman et al. (2020), we can interpret that the context, culture and ethical principles are substantial when working with projects that aim to promote the healthy development of a DC, and even more so if we are talking about a HDC. Furthermore, the results of our study suggest that the club promotes a series of actions that help student-football players to cope with the demands of the HDC that could be articulated in what is known

as a "Career Assistance Programme"; specifically, of a holistic type (CAP; Torregrossa et al., 2020; Jordana et al., 2019). These results could also be taken into account for proposals for other prevention-oriented work carried out with athletes to achieve their optimal performance from a holistic perspective (Gómez et al., 2019). Furthermore, working on and considering these aspects in the results would help athletes to cope with any kind of transition that might occur during their career (e.g. a pandemic; Zamora-Solé et al., 2022).

Our research can help to reflect the idea of a club model that is dedicated not only to developing football players, but people from a vision beyond the sporting sphere. This model could be generalisable to other clubs, as it provides an insight into the resources that student-football players may need to combine professional football with higher education. Nevertheless, some limitations should be noted. Firstly, the sample we have chosen is a small population, as there are few football players who reach senior level by combining professional football and higher education. Therefore, future research could explore the reasons for dropping out of school for those football players who would like to go on to higher education but have not been able to do so. Secondly, in order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants, although there is complementary information that could be interesting to share, we have chosen not to do so. Future research could prove that these results help to meet the needs of student-football players to perform a HDC. We also encourage other clubs to implement this HDC based on the actions we have suggested in our study. Finally, we believe that more research is needed to examine how the demands of different areas, as well as the benefits and resources offered by a HDC affect the MH of student-football players.

Conclusions

This work shows that it is indeed possible to combine professional football with higher education, provided that the environment is conducive to this higher dual career (HDC). We consider that the environment has a responsibility not only in the development of HDC, but also in the prevention of mental health (MH) of student-football players. In this sense, in order for these individuals to be able to complement sport and higher education in a healthy way, it is important that: (a) at the individual level, the club identifies the challenges they present and advises them on the necessary skills and resources; (b) at the micro level, the most relevant people in their environment have a set of skills and offer them adapted support, conditions and means; and (c) at the macro level, the club fosters a

culture that facilitates HDC and, at the same time, supports their emotional wellbeing. Specifically, and in terms of practical application, any club would have to take the following actions: (a) establish a planning and organisation between the different professionals who are part of the context of this type of athletes based on flexibility and adaptation of their needs through realistic objectives; (b) have professionals who provide them with competences related to the organisation, planning and management of transitions and, in addition, offer training for the people in their environment (e.g. mothers, fathers and partners) so that they can help them with the accompaniment of their higher dual career; and (c) establish a methodology based on self-knowledge and self-regulation of the student-athlete through a methodology based on self-knowledge and self-regulation of the student-athlete through programmes providing psychological tools and resources. Thus, despite the lifestyle of student-football players who develop in such an environment, if these suggested guidelines are followed, the risk factors could be counteracted by preventive factors. In other words, the stress of having to cope with so many demands, and therefore the danger of abandoning a sporting career or studies due to lack of resources, can be counteracted by a HDC with the means to provide them with alternatives both throughout their sporting career and at the end of it. And, by extension, it will seek to promote a life free of MH problems.

References

- Åkesdotter, C., Kenttä, G., Eloranta, S., & Franck, J. (2020). The prevalence of mental health problems in elite athletes. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 23(4), 329-335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2019.10.022>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and becoming a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>
- Brown, C. J., Webb, T. L., Robinson, M. A., & Cotgreave, R. (2019). Athletes' retirement from elite sport: A qualitative study of parents and partners' experiences. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 40, 51-60. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.09.005>
- Chamorro, J. L., Torregrosa, M., Sánchez Oliva, D., García Calvo, T., & León, B. (2016). Future Achievements, Passion and Motivation in the Transition from Junior-to-Senior Sport in Spanish Young Elite Soccer Players. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 19(E69), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sjp.2016.71>
- Defruyt, S., Wylleman, P., Torregrossa, M., Schipper-van Veldhoven, N., Debois, N., Cević Erpić, S., & De Brandt, K. (2019). The development and initial validation of the dual career competency questionnaire for support providers (DCCQ-SP). *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 0(0), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2019.1581827>
- Dugdale, J. H., Sanders, D., Myers, T., Williams, A. M., & Hunter, A. M. (2021). Progression from youth to professional soccer: A longitudinal study of successful and unsuccessful academy graduates. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 31, 73-84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sms.13701>
- Gómez, A., Roqueta, E., Tarragó, J. R., Seirul-lo, F., & Cos, F. (2019). Training in Team Sports: Coadjuvant Training in the FCB. *Apunts Educación Física y Deportes*, 138, 13-25. [https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.\(2019/4\).138.01](https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.(2019/4).138.01)
- Henriksen, K., Storm, L. K., Kuettel, A., Linnér, L., & Stambulova, N. (2020). A holistic ecological approach to sport and study: The case of an athlete friendly university in Denmark. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 47, 101637. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101637>
- Hodge, K., Henry, G., & Smith, W. (2014). A case study of excellence in elite sport: Motivational climate in a world champion team. *The Sport Psychologist*, 28(1), 60-74. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2013-0037>
- Hong, H. J., & Coffee, P. (2017). A psycho-educational curriculum for sport career transition practitioners: Development and evaluation. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 18, 287-306. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1387925>
- Hurley, D., Swann, C., Allen, M. S., & Vella, S. A. (2020). A qualitative evaluation of a mental health literacy intervention for parents delivered through community sport clubs. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 47, 101635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101635>
- Jordana, A., Pons, J., Borrueco, M., Pallarès, S., & Torregrossa, M. (2019). Implementation of a Dual Career Assistance Programme in a private multisport club. *Revista de Psicología Aplicada al Deporte y al Ejercicio Físico*, 4, pp. e9, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.5093/rpadef2019a8>
- Jordana, A., Ramis, Y., Chamorro, J. L., Pons, J., Borrueco, M., De Brandt, K., & Torregrossa, M. (2022). Ready for Failure? Irrational Beliefs, Perfectionism and Mental Health in Male Soccer Academy Players. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-022-00491-x>
- Kegelaers, J., Wylleman, P., Defruyt, S., Praet, L., Stambulova, N., Torregrossa, M., Kenttä, G., & De Brandt, K. (2022). The mental health of student-athletes: a systematic scoping review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2022.2095657>
- Kuettel, A., & Larsen, C. H. (2020). Risk and protective factors for mental health in elite athletes: A scoping review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 13(1), 231-265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2019.1689574>
- McGuine, T. A., Biese, K. M., Petrovska, L., Hetzel, S. J., Reardon, C., Kliethermes, S., Bell, D. R., Brooks, A., & Watson, A. M. (2021). Mental health, physical activity, and quality of life of US adolescent athletes during COVID-19-related school closures and sport cancellations: A study of 13 000 athletes. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 56(1), 11-19. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-0478.20>
- Mejías, J., Torregrossa, M., Jordana, A., Borrueco, M., Pons, J., & Ramis, Y. (2021). Taxonomía de Entornos Desarrolladores de Carrera Dual en España. *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte* 16(47), 19-29. <https://doi.org/10.12800/ccd.v16i47.1624>
- Morris, L. M., Twilley, D., Sidman, C. L., Adamczyk, H., Gasell, Z., & Plemmons, K. (2020). Student- Athletes: An exploration of subjective wellbeing. *The Sport Journal*, 24(1), 1-11.
- NCAA Sport Science Institute. (2016). Interassociation consensus document: Mental Health Best Practices. Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness. https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/ssi/mental/SSI_MentalHealthBestPractices.pdf
- Orozco, A. M., Pérez, A. A., & Sierra, F. S. (2018). U8 football training: Optimising educational potential. *Apunts Educación Física y Deportes*, 133, 68-84. [https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.\(2018/3\).133.05](https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.(2018/3).133.05)
- Pallarès, S., Azócar, F., Torregrosa, M., Selva, C., & Ramis, Y. (2011). Athletic career models in water polo and their involvement in the transition to an alternative career. *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*, 6(17), 93-103. <https://doi.org/10.12800/ccd.v6i17.36>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications. New York, New Delhi, London.
- Perez-Rivases, A., Pons, J., Regüela, S., Viladrich, C., Pallarès, S., & Torregrossa, M. (2020). Spanish female student-athletes' perception of key competencies for successful dual career adjustment. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2020.1717575>

- Prieto-Ayuso, A. (2008). La formación del talento en el ámbito deportivo: la transferencia de los procesos formativos en el ámbito educativo al joven jugador de fútbol. 2017 [The formation of talent in the sports field: the transfer of formative processes in the field of education to the young football (...)]. *Tesis doctorales*, (15). <https://revista-apunts.com/la-formacion-del-talento-en-el-ambito-deportivo-transferencia-de-los-procesos-formativos-en-el-ambito-educativo-al-joven-jugador-de-futbol/>
- Samuel, RD, Galily, Y. y Tenenbaum, G. (2017). ¿Quién eres, árbitro? Definición del árbitro de fútbol carrera desde una perspectiva basada en el cambio. *Revista Internacional de Psicología del Deporte y el Ejercicio*, 15(2), 118–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2015.1079792>
- Schinke, R. J., Stambulova, N., Si, G., & Moore, Z. (2018). International society of sport psychology position stand: Athletes' mental health, performance, and development. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16(6), 622-639. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2017.1295557>
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2017). *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*. Routledge.
- Stambulova, N., Engström, C., Franck, A., Linnér, L., & Lindahl, K. (2015). Searching for an optimal balance: Dual career experiences of Swedish adolescent athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 21, 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2014.08.009>
- Stambulova, N. B., Ryba, T. V., & Henriksen, K. (2020). Career development and transitions of athletes: the International Society of Sport Psychology Position Stand Revisited. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 0(0), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2020.1737836>
- Stambulova, N. B., & Wylleman, P. (2014). Athletes career development and transitions. In A. G. Papaioanu i D. Hackfort (Eds.), *Routledge companion to sport and exercise psychology: Global perspectives and fundamental concepts* (pp. 603-620). Routledge.
- Stambulova, N., & Wylleman, P. (2019). Psychology of athletes' dual careers: A state of the art critical review of the European discourse. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 42, 74-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.11.013>
- Storm, L. K., Henriksen, K., Stambulova, N. B., Cartigny, E., Ryba, T. V., De Brandt, K., Ramis, Y., & Cecić Erpić, S. (2021). Ten essential features of European dual career development environments: A multiple case study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 54, 101918. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.101918>
- Sullivan, M., Moore, M., Blom, L. C., & Slater, G. (2020). Relationship between social support and depressive symptoms in collegiate student athletes. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 14(3), 192-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2020.1768034>
- Torregrossa, M., Chamorro, J. L., Prato, L., & Ramis, Y. (2021). Grupos, Entornos y Carrera Deportiva. In T. García-Calvo, F. M. Leo, i E. Cervelló (Eds.), *Dirección de Equipos Deportivos* (pp. 355-374). Tirant Humanidades.
- Torregrossa, M., Ramis, Y., Pallarés, S., Azócar, F., & Selva, C. (2015). Olympic athletes back to retirement: A qualitative longitudinal study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 21, 50- 56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2015.03.003>
- Torregrossa, M., Regüela, S., & Mateos, M. (2020). Career Assistance Programmes. In D. Hackfort i R. J. Schinke (Eds.), *The Routledge International Encyclopedia of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (pp. 73-88). Routledge.
- World Medical Association (2013). World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. *JAMA*, 310(20), 2191–2194. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2013.281053>
- Wylleman, P., De Brandt, K., & Defruyt, S. (Eds.). (2017). GEES handbook for dual career support providers (DCSPs).
- Wylleman, P., De Brandt, K., & De Knop, P. (2020). Career development. In D. Hackfort, & R. J. Schinke (Eds.), *The Routledge International encyclopedia of Sport and Exercise psychology. Volume 2: Applied and Practical measures* (pp. 714-731). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Zamora-Solé, R., Alcaraz, S., Regüela, S., & Torregrossa, M. (2022). Experiences of Olympic Hopefuls of the Disruption of the Olympic Cycle at Tokyo 2020. *Apunts Educación Física y Deportes*, 148, 1-9. [https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.\(2022/2\).148.01](https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.(2022/2).148.01)

Conflict of Interests: No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.



© Copyright Generalitat de Catalunya (INEFC). This article is available at the URL <https://www.revista-apunts.com/en/>. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in the credit line; if the material is not included under the Creative Commons license, users will need to obtain permission from the license holder to reproduce the material. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>