

## UNIVERSITIES SPORTS MANAGERS ON DUAL CAREER

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**Abstract.** *The aim of this article is to give an overview on possibilities for students – top athletes to combine their career in respective sports field with studies in different Latvian higher education establishments. Authors of the article analyse scientific literature and the opinions expressed in the individual interviews of the heads of higher education institutions of Latvia as well as officials of State departments responsible for Sports regarding support opportunities that are important for the promotion of dual careers for students – top athletes. Authors of the article study and analyze the possibilities for top athletes to obtain higher education and opportunities to improve the training process. The article gives a theoretical insight and analyzes the results of surveys led by sports managers in Latvia's higher education institutions. After processing the responses, recommendations for the management of the dual career process in higher education institutions have been developed, which could help to achieve a successful implementation of dual career for athletes in Latvia.*

**Keywords:** *dual career, education, sports, top athletes.*

### Introduction

On average, 19 - 25 years of age for a person are referred to as adult *early maturity*, which falls within the same time when young people have completed secondary education and study at the university. The transition from high school to university for young people is associated with major changes in personal life (change of the environment, transition from junior sport to adult sport), which often gives young athletes additional stress. They face difficulties in getting involved in adult society and taking on the responsibility as adults for their decisions that will affect their future career in work and sport. Feeling that it is hard to achieve high-level athletic results, young people often make hasty decision to stop their athletic career in order to gain a profession (Ābeļkalns, 2013).

Young people today think of integration into society as of a successive transition from school to university, which prepares for certain education and employment positions. Such opinion corresponds to the situation of everyday life

that is based on work and family. It is true for the most of young people and it marks the difference between young people and adults.

## **Methodology**

The survey interview as a measurement tool for analyzing opinions was based on similar published studies on the formation of dual careers for students – top athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Aquilina, 2009; Engström, 2011; Stambulova, 2010).

Qualitative data processing program AQUAD Seven, statistical processing methods of EXCEL, descriptive and conclusive statistics, factor analysis and content analysis was used in processing of the data obtained in the survey.

Typically, an interview is not a complete, continuous story told by the respondent, but rather a series of responses to questions or suggestions from a researcher (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kroplijs & Raščevska, 2004). To obtain the results a semi-structured interview, with pre-written questions and option to provide free answers was used.

This type of interview allows the researchers to ask additional questions during the interview and, if necessary, to obtain more detailed information, as well as free responses reduce the possibility for the interviewed person to provide some pre-defined answers (Kroplijs & Raščevska, 2004; Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006; Kristapsone, 2008), and which respectively helps to acquire more objective information.

Individual interviews were documented in the form of an audio record, and then deciphered for more convenient use during analysis.

Before the interviews, the authors of the article met with 14 respondents, 8 men and 6 women, to agree to the interview and inform the respondents about their intent. The expected length of individual interviews was 30 - 40 minutes.

## **Results**

In order to get an opinion on the management of dual career process for students – top athletes and to develop recommendations for students – top athletes dual career guidance at the university, an interview developed by the authors was used. The interview is intended to acquire the information, while both the respondent and the researcher are in close social interaction. This is a time consuming process, because it is conducted with each respondent individually (Creswell, 1998).

The aim of the interviews was to obtain information, views and opinions on support during the studies and athletic career of students – top athletes which are both important factors for effective management of dual career.

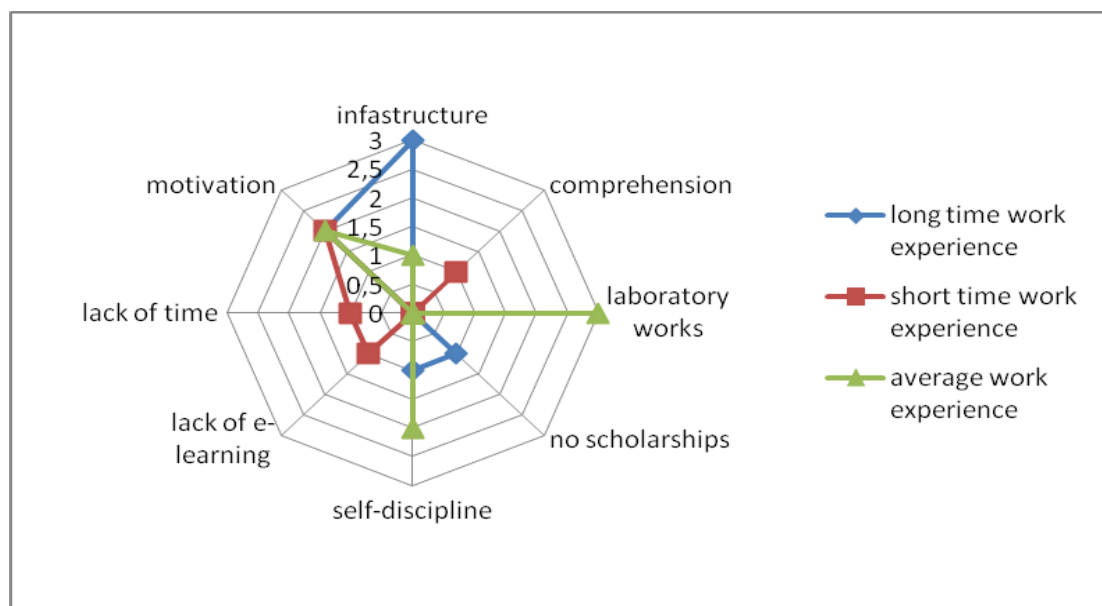
All respondents were divided into three groups according to the length of their work experience: short time (ST) work experience at university - up to 3 years; average work time (AT) experience at university - 4-7 years' work experience at university; long time (LT) work experience at university - 8 years' work experience at university and more. In each group there was similar amount of participants: 5 respondents had a long time work experience, 4 had average and 5 respondents had short time work experience at university. 12 of the respondents are sports managers in Latvia's higher education institutions (University of Latvia (LU), Riga Technical University (RTU), Latvian Academy of Sports Education (LSPA), Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LLU), Riga Stradins University (RSU), Daugavpils University (DU), Liepajas University (LiepU) whose students have proved to be students – top athletes. And 2 respondents are officials of State departments responsible for Sports.

There are long and exhaustive answers to the question “Why do students – top athletes have to study at universities?” pointing out that, first of all, education is necessary if athletes want to prove themselves in labour market, to gain stability, and obtain a profession that will be needed once the athletic career is over. And athletic careers usually are not very long. Education also gives better understanding about life processes not only in sports, but expands the horizons and provides a wider range of knowledge that helps athletes to develop their personalities and helps to find motivation to achieve higher athletic results. After analysing the respondent answers using *AQUAD Seven* data processing program, authors of the article conclude that respondents with longer time work experience as well as men emphasize the importance of the future profession. Respondents with average work experience and 4 women believe that education is necessary to improve the general knowledge which would help in further development. E.F. says “*I can honestly say that my great and long-time experience in sports confirms that athletes, who have good education, can also achieve great results in their respective athletic field. I can name several examples: J. Rubļevska – Olympic Vice-champion, Mg. degree obtained at LSPA, Laura Ikauniece-Admiņa – World Championship medallist, 4<sup>th</sup> place in Olympic games, graduated from LU, A. Kovals - Olympic Vice-champion, Mg. degree obtained at LU.*”

On this basis, it was important to understand what exactly are the factors, according to the opinion of sports managers, that help athletes to choose a study program and university. There are a lot of opinions: some sports managers (LT and ST) point out that the choice of education and studies depend on the athletes themselves and training conditions play an important role – it is important to have the possibility for high quality trainings near their establishment of education. There is also an opinion (AT) emphasising more the impact of family and coaches on the choice of further studies. The respondents also noted that for the athletes representing team sports, the team they play for has an important role. This is

based on the fact that it is easier to organize both study and training work for the athletes of the same team if they study at the same university. Many athletes want to develop their work career in close relation with their athletic career, working as coaches or trainers, physiotherapists, nutritionists, or sports journalists. It determines their choice for studying in programs related to sports. Based on theoretical knowledge and analysis of respondents' data, we can conclude that at this age, highly achieving athletes make their own career choices independently, but close cooperation with parents and coaches is desirable.

In this research sports managers in Latvia's higher education institutions defined problems that prevent highly achieving athletes to pursue a dual career in Latvia. As can be seen in Figure 1, in all work experience groups the most popular answer to the question is the lack of motivation of students. This fact is also supported by theoretical knowledge. By identifying to what kind of motivation the athlete is responding and knowing the differences between different kinds of motivation, and by creating conditions that increase the motivation enhancement possibilities, it is possible to increase athlete's self-motivation. Factors such as family, coaches, school and teachers, training group, friends, mass media, past events are all influencing motivation. But high performance athletes have to be willing to help themselves, to go analyze themselves, to move forward, because no one else can do it for them in their place. British scientist J. Whitmore (2013) explains that self-motivation is in the minds of every human being, even if it cannot be accessed by the highest level of power. He also believes that sports can be more motivating than business, and the best coaches are looking for ways to reinforce motivation.



*Figure 1 Problems as defined by the respondents, for highly achieving athletes pursuing the dual career in Latvian universities*

Respondents have observed lack of motivation for athletes - students during the first two years of studies, which in turn is related to the changes of environment from high school to university, from youth age to adult stage.

Sports managers who have a long time work experience at universities identify infrastructure as one of the main problems, because universities lack or do not have a high-level athletic training facilities, and therefore athletes - students should take a great distance from university to training area, then home, and vice versa.

The second largest problem is study programs involving laboratory and practical work. Athletes are often participating in competitions or training camps outside the country and cannot attend practical work, while lecturers are not interested to do extra work with athletes.

When students – top athletes get to the university, it is important to find out what support universities and their sports clubs can offer students - athletes to train and learn at a high level. There is still no unified system in Latvia's universities to support high level athletes in order to combine their studies and trainings; only individually-designed regulations exist at each university. Respondents mentioned e-learning as a solution (noting that there is still a lot to do in this area), and studies according to an individual plan. Discounts to tuition fees in amount of 50 - 100% are offered to high level athletes, and in some cases, “budget places”.

Opinions of respondents on tuition fee discounts:

H.V. emphasizes: “students – top athletes *study at our university free of charge (study fee discount 100%). Their grades often are not good, but there is a City Council Decision regarding their studies, and they study for free. This is not always justified. A contract is necessary. There are athletes who are studying whose tuition fee is covered by budget funding, but they have poor grades, they are unable to organize their time, do not take studies seriously*”.

Whereas S.S. says “*We support students – top athletes by creating individual study plans: they have the opportunity to study one study course for two years free of charge, having their study fee covered by budget funding*”

I.Ā., U.B. are supporting tuition fee discounts: “*A while ago we tried to support athletes – students by allowing their tuition fee to be covered by budget funding in some study programs, but it didn't really work because students thought they were entitled to this funding and their rights were untouchable. Starting from year 2000 we do not allocate budget funding, instead we provide an individual tuition fee discount that varies from 50% to 100%. Athletes must submit reports both on study and training work after each semester. If the results are satisfactory, the discount is extended for the next semester, if not, the discount is lost. Students – top athletes evaluate opportunities, start planning and feel more responsible for their study work*”.

Analyzing the opinions of the respondents, it can be concluded that sports managers emphasize the need for the establishment of a national system and the need for modern sports infrastructure at universities, as well as the need to improve the existing e-learning process. Other managers underline the importance of teachers' understanding and implementation of individual study plan. In order to be able to see more easily what support is provided and what would be needed in Latvian higher education institutions, the information is summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1 Support for students – top athletes in Latvian universities*

	<b>The support provided</b>	<b>What would be needed</b>
LSPA	Individual study plans and programs; Participation fee for competitions is paid in some cases.	To create a Career Counselling Centre; Teachers' understanding; Support from Psychologists; e-learning; Financial support, living conditions, training opportunities close to the place of residence and studies.
RTU	Usage of training facilities and different travel costs paid for the participants of National Teams; 20 scholarships per year for students – top athletes; Individual study plans and programs	Creation of infrastructure for sport; possibility to work individually on laboratory works; nationwide system for support
LU	Tuition fee discount; Scholarships; Training possibilities for as much as possible; Student hostel; Individual study plans and programs; Participation in competitions	Financial support to provide studies/training possibilities; Cooperation with IZM [ <i>Ministry of Education and Science</i> ], LSFP [ <i>Latvian Sports Federations Council</i> ]; Improvement of training facilities; medical supplies
RSU	100% study fee discount (for 5 students – students top athletes per year); Training facilities; Physiotherapist is available	Own sports complex
DU	One-time scholarships; Tuition fee discounts up to 100%; Applicants having high achievements in sport, are matriculated out-of-competition in any study program for full-time studies on budget funding; Individual study plans and programs.	Support from the State
LiepU	Tuition fee 100% paid by City Council; Individual study plans and programs.	Contracts with athletes; e-learning; Budget funding.
LLU	Individual study plans and programs; e- learning; Tuition fee discount.	Financial support from university
LSFP/ LOK	Each year students – top athletes (35 ± 4) receive scholarships of up to €1000 / month each. The amount of the scholarship depends on the results achieved.	Create a dual career system in the country / at national level; Greater support from universities; Flexible study schedule; Special Scholar-ships for athletes; Student sports in general; Dual career adviser (mentor) at university; Staff

When studying the impact of the environment on the dual career of students – top athletes, authors note close cooperation is needed between the university and the sports club, as well as university and sports federations. During the research it was concluded that the cooperation is not close. Some of the sports managers say, “Unfortunately, the federations very little support athletes' willingness to learn, one can say they do not support it at all! On the contrary, we support them. Collaboration exists, but only as moral support, no more”. In this context, a new field of challenges for future research is emerging.

In all respondent groups, the following phrase related to the environmental factor was mentioned: *“It is important that the place of studies, training facilities and place of residence should be as close as possible. A lot of (useless) time is spent while getting from one place to another”*.

The Latvian Olympic Committee (LOC) spokesperson M.V., while explaining the environmental factor, says: *“Character, purposefulness helps in learning. Motivate. Silovs lived in Riga, but when Ventspils Olympic Center was opened he moved to Ventspils because he could train and study at Ventspils University College. Edžus Treimanis is from Valmiera and studies at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Anastasia Grigoryeva is training and studying in Daugavpils. The LOC provides the opportunity to train at the Olympic Centers. If at first the Olympic Centers could only be used by athletes from the list A of LOV, they are now also used by B-list athletes”*. J.G. says *“... if athletes can prove themselves in their respective athletic field then they want to prove themselves also in their studies as they have a high self-esteem. This is especially true for students in the Master's programs, as they come themselves to lecturers and ask when it would be possible for them to pass their tests”*.

After summarizing the opinions of the universities sports managers and taking into account the theoretical knowledge of the scientists, a table (Table 2) was created portraying problems and solutions for successful dual career development for high-end athletes – students.

*Table 2 Problems and solutions for successful dual career in Latvian higher education institutions, as formulated by Respondents*

<b>Main challenges for successful integration of higher education and high performance sport</b>	<b>Suggestions for solutions</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Specifics of the University (laboratory works; studies in medical study programs, and engineering programs); Planning of study programs;	Support from university, by informing lecturers about the specifics of studies for students – top athletes in order to achieve mutual understanding between both parties. Support from the State – in some universities, such as LU, LSPA, RSU,	State budget funding to pay for lecturers for additional work Sign mutual agreements for the implementation of study programs

	ViA, study programs should be developed only for students – top athletes.	
Time management	e-environment that is up to date and well arranged	Organize additional courses for athletes in time management
Attitude and will of athletes	Athletes must make the decision on their own that they need education	Federations need to educate trainers on creation of attitude and will
Motivation	The support of coaches, friends, and parents, as well as advices from career advisers (mentors) is important.	reinforcement of motivation and dual careers
Infrastructure	Convincing the government and local governments of the need to create a sport-friendly environment for all population groups.	
Low funding in sports; Scholarship	Create the will of the federations to be interested in expanding the athlete's potential in the field of education.	
Communication	There should be a website to find out about higher education institutions, opportunities for tuition fees for students – top athletes, information from Olympic centres, sports federations.	The work could start on the homepage of the Latvian University Sports Association and Latvian Sports Federations Council

Analyzing the views and opinions on dual career of all sports managers from different universities, the authors of the research conclude (see Figure 2) that representatives of all age groups indicate that the most important is to find the solution of financial problems and the introduce dual career advisers (mentors) in higher education institutions. The need to prioritize dual career system at national level, educate athletes so that they could set and achieve their goals on their own is mentioned to be essential. *“We need the kind of people (consultants, coaches) as there are abroad. For Ice hockey there is an association... That helps to integrate into life, into study programs. I have seen several athletes who don't know what to do after school. They are about to finish high school, but they have no hobbies that could become a career. They are not interested in anything. The biggest problem for athletes is that they think that without sports there is nothing else. Sport is the only thing that exists in life. But once their sports career is over, they will understand that the world is much bigger. It would be great if an adviser could help athletes expand and broaden their horizons”*.

A good example of time-planning skills: *“The desire to learn and time planning skills is very important for students – top athletes. For example A. S. is already studying at their third university (Banking Institution of Higher*



Education, Law College, LSPA). He says: *Jurmala City Council came to me and offered to organize a beach volleyball school, promised to help pay for studies, which is a support in a way. A.S. takes also dance classes, and learns Arabic in Egypt, which in a way would be a nuisance for sport but at the same time this widens his horizons”.*

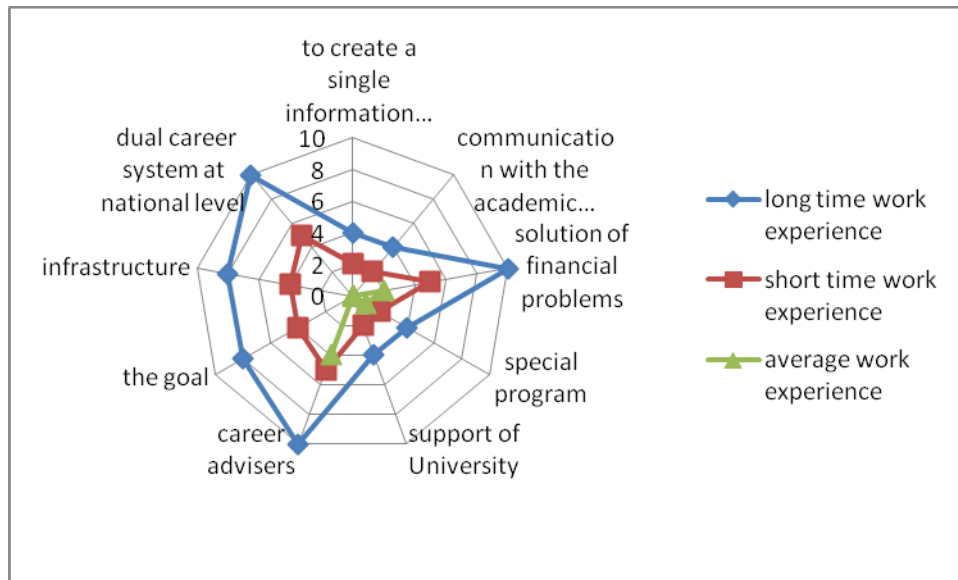


Figure 2 **Recommendations of universities sports managers on development of dual career in Latvia; grouped according to work experience**

The leader of the LSFP mentions courses organized by sports federations that could be one of the options for education of students – top athletes and an opportunity for dual career: *“Development of additional study programs in cooperation with federations. There are several athletes who have come to me after their athletic careers are over and asked: What can I do? If some 5-6 jobs were created in different sports organizations, our athletes would get acquainted with job responsibilities and would be able to understand what sport management means. Some practical things – managers of sports events, organizers. So that they could see what sport is like looking from the other side”.*

Based on the analysis of the theoretical literature, the analysis of the surveys and interviews conducted (Fig. 3), authors of the article developed recommendations for sports managers in universities on how to work with the dual career of students – top athletes.

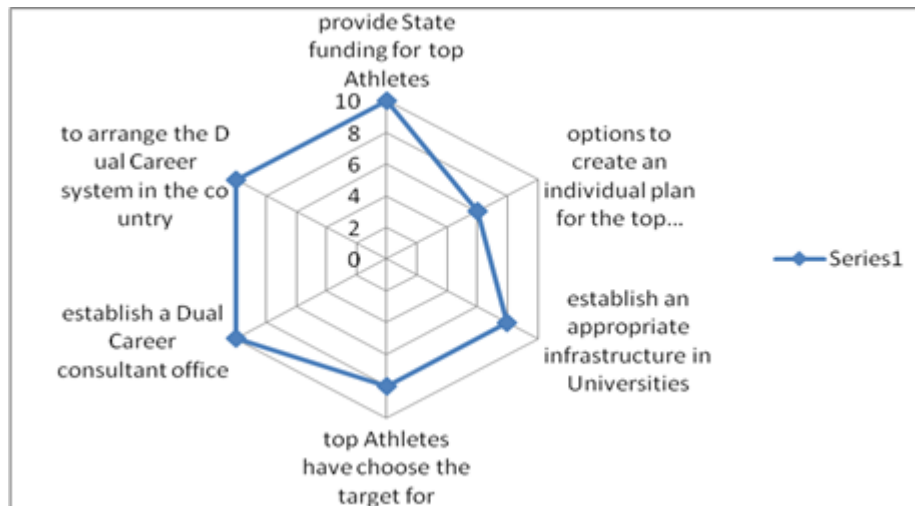


Figure 3 Recommendations of universities sports managers for dual career development in Latvia

## Conclusion

Universities should pay more attention to the organization and quality assurance of the study process, rather than to the content of studies, in order to implement the transition of higher education to study-based qualifications. The boards of higher education institutions should implement a successful, quality-based and forward-looking management of the study process, thus promoting for their students the development of the competences necessary for life.

Creation and implementation of dual career guidelines at national level is required. There is European Union guidelines developed to ensure that young athletes continue to benefit from quality education through further development of their sports training process. EU guidelines are recommendations to the governments of the Member States. Each Member State has its own culture and specificity; therefore the authors of the article propose to develop dual career guidelines that are suitable for Latvia. When creating dual career guidance opportunities for students – top athletes, it is not enough to have organization and individuals. It is essential that there is a person that helps to create and manage a dual career.

It is necessary to find financial resources from the State budget to implement institution of adviser (mentor) for students – top athletes, as well as to be able to fund additional practical and laboratory work of lecturers. Lecturers should develop distance learning courses.

Authors' suggest Sports Federations to organize additional time management courses for athletes. Also it is recommended to work with and make

them understand the essence of dual careers, so that they would work with their students in this direction too.

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