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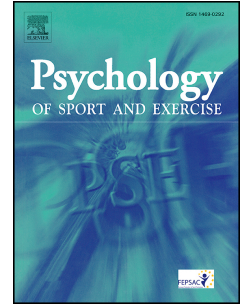
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Supporting adolescent athletes' dual careers: The role of an athlete's social support
network

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Authors Note: Since the completion of this study, Paul Sellars has subsequently moved to Cardiff School of Sport, Cardiff Metropolitan University.

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21 network in facilitating a dual career in sport and education, and, (b) gain insights into the
22 factors that may optimize the provision of such support.

23 **Design:** A two-stage qualitative study.

24 **Method:** In stage one, four different sport and education settings in the UK were examined: A
25 tennis academy, a football academy, a national field hockey squad, and a high-performance
26 swimming squad. Interviews were conducted with two athletes and associated significant
27 others from each setting. In stage two, nine current or former international athletes from a
28 variety of sports and countries recalled their experiences of managing a dual career. Analysis
29 was conducted following the procedures outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

30 **Results:** Overall, athletes in stage one and two perceived that to maintain their dual careers,
31 they were heavily dependent upon the support of significant others. The role of the support
32 network was to recognize the demands of a dual career, anticipate problems, value education,
33 minimize barriers, and create autonomy-supportive environments. Key factors to optimize
34 such support were focusing on the whole person, providing integrated support, and fostering a
35 culture that promotes continuing education.

36 **Conclusions:** Results indicate that athletes require particular types of support within their
37 home, at school, and in their sport context to be able to manage their dual career. However, a
38 range of individual and group-level factors may influence the extent to which such support is
39 available to athletes.

40

41 **Key Words:** Dual Career, Sport, Education, Adolescence, Social Support

42

43 Leuon, & Wynneman, 2015; McCormack & Walseth, 2013; Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen,
46 Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015). The stimuli for such research has been the recognition of the
47 individual and societal benefits that arise when athletes maintain their education or a
48 vocational career while competing on the international stage (cf., European Commission
49 2007, 2011). Research has identified that athletes who gain academic qualifications are better
50 prepared to manage transitions, cope with expected and unexpected exits from sport, and have
51 the potential to make a positive contribution to the workforce beyond sport (Torregrosa
52 Ramis, Pallarés, Azócar, & Selva, 2015). Additionally, many athletes are unable to maintain a
53 living from their sport career earnings for an extended period of time (cf., McCormack &
54 Walseth, 2013), so ensuring athletes can start a “second career” when they retire is necessary.

55 Athletes usually demonstrate high levels of motivation for the maintenance of a dual
56 career (Lupo et al., 2015). However, it can be a challenging proposition and one that is a
57 concern for most high-performance athletes (Ryba et al., 2015). Such challenges arise because
58 success in both elite sport and education/work require extensive time commitments (Ryan,
59 2015). Time commitments increase through childhood and particularly in adolescence as
60 academic workload, along with training and competition load, increase rapidly (Borggreffe &
61 Cachay, 2012). Consequently, maintaining a dual-career can result in fatigue, a loss of
62 motivation, a lack of opportunities to participate in activities outside of sport or education, as
63 well as athlete overload and increased injury risk (e.g., McCormack & Walseth, 2013).

64 Despite the potential negative consequences outlined above, the impact of engaging in a
65 dual career on athletes’ actual sporting success appears equivocal (Henry, 2010). There has
66 been some indication that the simultaneous engagement in sport and academia could result in
67 a decrease in sporting performance and has been reported as a concern for some coaches

70 and educational experiences of elite adult performers from France, Finland, and the UK.
71 Athletes highlighted numerous benefits from their dual career including: the belief the skills
72 learnt in one setting were transferred to others; the balance of intellectual and physical
73 stimulation, which increased motivation and commitment to both domains, and; feelings of
74 security in their sport, which allowed athletes to perform better.

75 Recognising the difficulties associated with maintaining education while participating in
76 elite sport, the European Commission and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have
77 acknowledged the need to research and promote policies regarding athletes' engagement in
78 education (cf. Amara, Aquilina, Henry, & PMP, 2004; Aquilina & Henry, 2010). Such
79 attention to understanding and developing sport and education policies is important to
80 increase opportunities for adolescent and young adult athletes to succeed in academic and
81 sporting domains. However, such a focus on policy and organisational factors associated is
82 insufficient if we fail to concurrently understand the more proximal support athletes require.
83 Aquilina (2013) explored the social support network university student-athletes utilized to
84 manage their university and sport involvement. At the more distal levels, Aquilina highlighted
85 the role of the European Union and the International Olympic Committee, elite training
86 centres, NGBs, the state, researchers, and medical staff in supporting student-athletes. At the
87 most proximal level, the need for support from academic staff, clubs, peers, coaches, and
88 family were highlighted. Such findings have been supported across many studies of athletes
89 engaged in tertiary (i.e., university) education (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Carless & Douglas,
90 2009) and together provide extensive insights into the lives of university student-athletes.

91 In contrast, our understanding of the support needed by talented adolescent athletes to
92 maintain their dual career before they reach university has received scarce attention (cf.

95 2010a, 2010b, 2011, Larsen, Alfermann, & Henriksen, 2013), which have highlighted the
96 proximal support needs of prospective elite athletes. For instance, Larsen et al. (2013)
97 examined the environmental characteristics of a successful under-17 male soccer team. Most
98 pertinent for the current study, the players perceived that maintaining a dual career was
99 particularly demanding. Players indicated being largely dependent upon tangible and
100 informational support provided by their school, as well as regular communication between the
101 club, the school, and their parents to manage school and training demands. Clearly, given the
102 complexity associated with a dual career, specific examination of this area is warranted to
103 ensure that athletes receive optimal support.

104 Particularly, there is a specific need to understand what support is required for mid to
105 late-adolescent athletes because, from the ages of 15/16 to 18 years, athletes encounter a
106 critical time of life as they experience multiple demands and transitions, many of which are
107 associated with athletes' engagement in dual careers (e.g., Stambulova, Engström, Franck,
108 Linnér, & Lindal, 2015). As highlighted within the Holistic Athletic Career model, during
109 mid-late adolescence athletes may be transitioning (or considering transitioning) from
110 secondary to tertiary education, experiencing changes in their psychosocial support, and also
111 potential changes in financial support (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). These changes
112 may co-exist with elevated athletic demands and thus, mid-to-late adolescence is a time when
113 support for a dual career is likely to be particularly important.

114 The need for such support has been illustrated in two recent studies of adolescent
115 athletes (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015; Stambulova et al., 2014). For instance,
116 Stambulova and colleagues (2014) examined the social and cultural influences on the dual
117 career experiences of Swedish adolescent athletes at sport schools. Reinforcing the findings

120 demands they encountered. However, the specific types of support athletes desired and the
121 ways in which such support was provided was not discussed. In fact, beyond knowing that
122 support is required, we are unaware of what support is required from individuals surrounding
123 athletes to enable them to successfully maintain a dual career.

124 If we are to create effective policies to facilitate athletes' dual careers, generate
125 guidelines for organizations or clubs, or provide education to coaches, parents, teachers or
126 athletes, we must generate clearer insights into the specific support needs for such adolescent
127 athletes. To this end, the objectives of this study were to, (a) understand the role of the social
128 support network in facilitating a dual career in sport and education, and; (b) gain insights into
129 factors that help optimize the provision of such support.

130 **Method**

131 **Methodology**

132 To address the aforementioned research questions, a two-stage qualitative design was
133 adopted. Such an approach was deemed appropriate for the current study as we sought to
134 understand the experiences athletes and members of their social support networks have of
135 providing and receiving support for a dual career. The study was positioned within the
136 interpretivist paradigm, underpinned by ontological relativism and epistemological
137 constructionism. That is, within this study, it was assumed that reality is multiple and
138 subjective and that knowledge is socially constructed (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

139 Stage one focused on understanding the support required from, and delivered by,
140 members of adolescent athletes' support network across a variety of sports within the UK.
141 The focus on various sports was driven by a recognition that opportunities to combine
142 education and training/competition vary across sports (Knight & Holt, 2011), that the motives

143 particularly challenging (Wyllie & Lavallee, 2004). As such, stage one focused on athletes
146 and members of their support network from four sports, which were selected based on: 1)
147 Education and sport combination (traditional schooling; traditional school and academy
148 provision; sport academy and online/home schooling); 2) Sport type (individual, traditional
149 Olympic sport; team, traditional Olympic sport; individual, professional sport; team,
150 professional sport), and; 3) Athletes' age (athletes aged 15-16 years, completing their GCSE¹
151 exams and athletes aged 16-18 years, currently completing higher education awards). The aim
152 of such criteria was to achieve maximal variance between participants.

153 Having completed stage one, stage two sought to examine the extent to which the
154 findings from adolescent participants in the UK aligned with, or could be corroborated by,
155 elite athletes in different sports and countries who had achieved success in their sport while
156 maintaining their education. Specifically, stage two sought to examine the adolescent dual-
157 career experience of athletes who had achieved at the highest levels (e.g., competed at
158 Olympic Games and World Championships) in their sport while also completing their school
159 and/or university education (i.e., dual career attention). Such retrospective accounts were
160 deemed valuable as they provided the perspective of athletes who had experience of
161 succeeding in sport while studying, and as such were in a position to reflect on the long-term
162 impact and value of the support they received as an adolescent athlete.

163 **The Research Team**

164 In line with an interpretivist paradigm, it is important to note the roles and experience
165 of the research team. The first and second author were both responsible for developing the

¹ The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualification, generally taken in a number of subjects by pupils as they end their compulsory secondary education in England and Wales.

168 writing. The second author acted as a critical friend throughout analysis and writing and the
169 third author conducted the majority of interviews in stage one.

170 When starting this study, the first author had approximately eight years of experience
171 as a qualitative researcher within youth sport, with a specific focus on the role of parents.
172 Further, she had approximately 15 years of experience of studying while competing in sport.
173 The second author had over 20 years of experience as a youth sport researcher, with a
174 particular focus on parents and coaches. He also had over 30 years of combining sport and
175 education/work. Finally, the third author was a postgraduate student completing his MSc by
176 Research and had experience of playing county and regional-level rugby union while
177 completing his compulsory and higher education.

178 **Stage one**

179 **Participants and Sampling.** Aligned with the desire to sample a range of sport and
180 schooling set-ups, four sporting set-ups were selected from which to sample participants: 1) A
181 tennis academy, in which athletes complete their education and sport at one venue; academic
182 work is provided through an online education system overseen by a tutor; 2) National field
183 hockey squad in which athletes attend a regular school, access training and competition
184 through local clubs and leagues, with monthly national training events and international
185 competitions, 3) A high performance swimming squad comprising international swimmers,
186 accessing education through the traditional school system and completing their training before
187 and after the school day; and, 4) A football academy which caters for elite football players
188 who complete their education through the traditional school system to the age of 16 years and
189 study at the football academy from the ages of 16-18 years.

190 Within each sporting set-up two athletes, one aged 15/16 years completing their

193 based on feedback from the head coach and/or manager were selected to participate. During
194 the athlete interviews, each athlete was asked to visually and verbally identify the members of
195 their support network they perceived to be particularly influential in their dual career. Such
196 athlete-centered choices were deemed important so as to avoid any external presumptions or
197 predetermination of significant others. Having identified the people they deemed to be
198 influential, approval to contact them was gained from the athletes and then consent to
199 participate was gained from the individuals themselves. All but two individuals (one
200 footballer's mother and one teacher) agreed to participate. Table 1 provides detail on the
201 participants from each sport and Table 2 provides the overall demographic information.

202 ****Insert Table 1 around here ****

203 ****Insert Table 2 around here ****

204 **Procedure.** On receipt of institutional ethical approval, appropriate venues from which
205 to recruit participants were identified based upon the research team's knowledge of different
206 sports and through conversations with sport scientist and performance lifestyle advisors.
207 Having identified appropriate venues, approval was sought from the head coach to approach
208 athletes deemed to be succeeding at managing a dual career. The athletes were approached
209 and provided with an information sheet. Once athletes had responded, an appropriate time and
210 location for an interview was identified. Prior to interviews, informed consent was received
211 from the athletes and, where necessary, their parents.

212 **Data collection.** Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews. The

² AS and A levels are the traditional qualifications offered by schools and colleges for 16-19 year olds. They generally focus on academic subjects, although some are work-related. AS levels are usually taken as the first part of an A level course, although they can be taken as a stand-alone qualification. BTEC (Business and Technology Education council) are specialist work-related qualifications that combine practical learning with theory content. They are usually conducted between the ages of 16 and 19 years.

215 Aquilina, 2013). The interviews started by asking the participant to describe their
216 involvement in sport/the athletes' sport and school. Next questions moved onto general
217 perceptions of dual careers and the benefits and challenges associated with maintaining school
218 and sport. The interviews then moved onto the main questions, asking the participants what
219 support they required or provided to enable the athlete to maintain their dual career.
220 Penultimate questions focused on factors that may impact upon the support required or
221 desired. Finally, the interviews ended with questions summarizing the key ideas identified
222 earlier in the interview. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 87 minutes ($M=47$ mins).

223 **Data analysis.** All interviews were transcribed verbatim and then read and re-read by
224 the first author to ensure immersion in the data. The transcripts from each participant from
225 each sport were read and each interview for each sport was then individually analyzed
226 following the qualitative data analysis procedures recommended by Miles, Huberman, and
227 Saldaña (2014). Analysis occurred in three stages. Firstly, descriptive codes (e.g., talking to
228 athlete, structuring communication, making time for others) were allocated to the data to
229 identify the raw data themes. Next interpretive codes, such as help timetabling and
230 understanding demands, were generated. These codes group descriptive codes into more
231 abstract concepts. Finally, pattern codes (e.g., understanding of the demands of a dual career,
232 valuing education) were identified, which demonstrated relationships between the interpretive
233 codes and provide an indication of the overarching ideas contained within each sport. A
234 summary of the overall findings for each sport was then constructed, prior to comparing the
235 codes across sports. Cross-sport analysis occurred by placing the pattern codes from each of
236 the sports within data matrices to allow for systematic review of the data.

237 **Stage Two**

240 USA) participated in stage two. Two of the participants were still competing while the other
241 seven had retired from their sport. Participants competed in swimming, shooting, pentathlon,
242 sailing, alpine ski-racing, and badminton³, and all had attended at least one Olympic games or
243 World Championships as well as European, All-African, and Commonwealth games. The
244 participants had attended 12 Olympic Games and 24 World-Championships, amassing a total
245 of seven gold medals, 13 silver medals, and five bronze medals across these championships.

246 All of the participants had completed their compulsory (secondary) education while
247 competing, in one of three varieties of institutions: Four participants had attended a private
248 school, two attended a sport school, and three had completed their schooling through the
249 mainstream system in their country. While competing, six had also obtained a Bachelors
250 degree, and two a Masters degree. Of the seven retired athletes, one was in full-time education
251 and the other six were in full-time employment. Since retiring, two participants had
252 completed a bachelor degree, one obtained a Masters degree, and one completed a PhD.

253 **Procedure.** Following the completion of phase one, phase two was carried out.
254 Through communication with the International Olympic Committee, potential participants
255 who had maintained a dual career while competing, achieved at the highest level in their
256 sport, and were able to converse in English were identified. These individuals were sent an
257 email outlining the study purpose and procedures, along with a consent form. Participants
258 who were interested in taking part in the study then contacted the lead author who organized a
259 suitable time for a Skype interview.

260 **Data collection.** Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews
261 began with a brief overview of the purpose of the study as well as a review of important

³ In the results, Participant 1 = Sailor; Participant 2,5, 7, and 8 = Swimmers; Participant 3 = Shooting; Participant 4 = Heptathlon; Participant 6 = Badminton; Participant 9 = Skiing,

264 adolescence and early adulthood, providing insights into their overall experiences of a dual
265 career during this time. The majority of the interview then focused on how different members
266 of their support network facilitated or detracted from their adolescent dual career and the
267 identification of suggestions to enhance the support significant others provide to athletes.
268 Next participants were given a summary of the findings from stage one and asked to provide
269 any insights into the similarities or differences with their experiences. Interviews ended with a
270 review of the main areas covered and an opportunity for athletes to give further information.
271 On completion of the interview participants were sent a copy of the recommendations from
272 stage one for comment. Interviews ranged in length from 72 to 126 minutes ($M=88$ mins).

273 **Data analysis.** Stage two data collection and analysis began following the completion
274 of the analysis of stage one data. The data were analysed using the same process of
275 identifying descriptive codes, interpretive codes, and pattern codes as adopted in stage one.
276 The findings from stage two were then compared to those from stage one to enable the
277 identification of similarities and differences between experiences. This facilitated the
278 identification of any factors that may impact upon the support provided or required for
279 adolescent athletes to maintain a dual career.

280 **Methodological Rigor**

281 It has been suggested that a relativist rather than criterion approach to judging the
282 quality of qualitative research is appropriate (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Aligned with this
283 approach, we have drawn upon the nine suggestions of Smith and Caddick (2012) that we
284 deemed appropriate for the current study. However, we recognize that these criteria are open-
285 ended and subject to reinterpretation and encourage the reader to make their own judgments.

288 social support network. The justification for this is provided through the manuscript
289 introduction. We perceive that through the use of extensive interviews in a novel area that this
290 study will have *impact* by encouraging the generation of new research questions, as well as
291 encouraging those working with athletes to seek to develop strategies to enhance the support
292 they provide to young athletes engaged in a dual career. Through the use of pilot interviews, a
293 two-stage study process, as well as the involvement of athletes and members of their social
294 support network across a range of sporting and education set-ups, and the provision of
295 numerous quotes within the results we have sought to demonstrate *width* or
296 comprehensiveness of evidence. Further, we have attempted to demonstrate *coherence* by
297 ensuring continuity between the philosophical underpinnings of the study, the research
298 question, the data collection and analysis methods, and the presentation of the results.

299 *Catalytic and tactical authenticity* is exhibited through the interest the findings of this
300 study have garnered from the sports organisations involved and their desire to make change
301 based upon subsequently developed recommendations. By encouraging participants to select
302 the individuals they deemed most influential in their dual career and asking participants in
303 stage two to reflect on the findings produced in stage one, we sought to remove notions of the
304 research team as the experts. Rather, we *critiqued* this approach and sought to empower the
305 participants to demonstrate their expertise. Through detailed descriptions of the participants
306 involved in the study, the use of rich description of findings and extensive quotes, and also
307 the location of the current findings within previous literature, we hope the results *resonate*
308 with readers. Finally, *credibility and transparency* were sought through pilot interviews,
309 engagement with multiple individuals within each sport in stage one and prolonged, detailed

312
313 In stage one and two, the athletes discussed a range of benefits associated with their
314 dual-career, particularly the value of having education to “fall back on” if their sporting career
315 was unsuccessful. Despite the benefits, participants also highlighted a number of challenges.
316 Support from members of their support network was seen to be particularly important in
317 enabling the maintenance of school and elite sport. Overall, participants from stage one and
318 two generally indicated that they were reliant upon support from their parents (particularly
319 their fathers within football), their coach, teachers/tutors, and where available performance
320 lifestyle or welfare advisors. Certain individuals mentioned peers or siblings in passing but
321 compared to others, their support appeared to be less influential.

322 Although there were differences in the experiences of the participants in stage one and
323 two, there was much similarity in the roles of the support network in helping them maintain
324 their dual career as an adolescent. As such, in the following sections, data from stage one and
325 two are combined⁴. First, the characteristics that comprise the role of the dual career support
326 network are detailed. Secondly, factors that enable support to be optimized are described.

327 **Role of the Support Network**

328 The role of the support network appeared to be characterized by the five themes.
329 Namely, the support network: (a) Recognize dual career athletes’ needs and make adaptive
330 changes, (b) Anticipate barriers and suggest solutions, (c) Demonstrate a belief in the value of
331 education and a dual career, (d) Remove barriers to maintenance of a dual career, and (e)
332 Create an autonomy-supportive environment to foster dual career athletes’ independence.

⁴ To allow for distinction between participants from stage one and two, pseudonyms have been given to the stage one participants, and numbers have been given to stage two participants.

335 engaging in a dual career and change their support in response. This may include recognizing
336 the day-to-day demands athletes' experience and altering expectations or requirements as
337 demonstrated by the father of one of the swimmers, "She [Cally] gets tired, sometimes after a
338 hectic week training... You can see it and maybe that will affect her concentration a bit. Rude.
339 Obviously, we'll sort of pinpoint that, we understand." Similarly, a performance lifestyle
340 advisor for the tennis players shared her understanding of demands, explaining, "I don't envy
341 them. A 15-year-old trying to do his homework at school every day finds it tough enough, let
342 alone when you're travelling and you're having to try and study in between matches."

343 By recognizing the challenges of the dual career, the support network could adapt their
344 behaviors to help athletes in positive manners. Numerous examples of changes in behaviors in
345 response to the demands were provided, ranging from reducing the number of chores at home,
346 to providing flexible school timetables, and changing training timetables to facilitate school
347 commitments. As Hannah's swim coach said, "I can say, 'well actually if you're stressed
348 today perhaps you don't need to do that type of training, perhaps do a different type of
349 training.'" Similarly, the mother of a swimmer (Lisa) explained, "I think as a parent you cut
350 her that slack almost because of the hours that she's doing in there." In contrast, Participant 8,
351 who was also a swimmer but had a more difficulty maintaining her dual-career, described the
352 challenges she encountered because her school was not flexible, "I was away for 3 months
353 and when I got back there was no support in me catching up on school work ... the principal
354 called up my parents and said to them they weren't willing to help me catch up."

355 If the demands athletes encountered were not recognized or adapted to, the participants
356 recalled many more issues with the maintenance of a dual career. However, by changing their
357 behaviors to meet athletes' needs, members of the support network displayed an appreciation

360 relation to understanding from her school, "My head teacher was the best, ...he'd support
361 swimming and school at the same time; he'd always make sure that I was ok in school."

362 **Anticipate problems and suggest solutions.** In addition to recognizing the general
363 demands of a dual career, responding to specific challenges that arise at certain times or in
364 certain situations was also deemed necessary. For example, Dillon's (one of the tennis
365 players) strength and conditioning coach explained how they changed their program for
366 athletes who got "edgy" and "anxious" around exam time. As he said, "we're normally quite
367 bespoke with their program about that time of year." Similarly, Brody explained how his
368 football club anticipated challenges during exam times and changed their timetables:

369 I used to go out of school on Tuesday afternoon and Thursday afternoon, during the
370 exam times obviously there is a lot more revision that you need to get done and
371 deadlines that you need to meet, so the club is alright with me not training on Tuesday
372 and Thursday afternoons and just come in on the evenings to get the work done.

373 The flexibility and understanding demonstrated by the school and the academy ensured that
374 athletes felt capable of maintaining their dual career and maximised opportunities for success.

375 Furthermore, the support network perceived that they should anticipate and plan for
376 problems that may arise in specific situations. For example, the tennis players regularly
377 travelled abroad and could encounter challenges if they did not have access to the Internet to
378 complete their work. Recognizing this problem, Dillon's parents prepared strategies to limit
379 any negative consequences. As Dillon's mother said, "Sometimes poor Internet [is an
380 issue]...So even with that what we have to try and prepare for that by making hard copies of
381 things that he's going to work on, so that he can at least sit down and work." Similarly, the

384 You know, organizing the schedule with [coach] and making sure everything's up to
385 date with that, if she needs any extra kind of things, extra schoolwork or extra physio
386 and things like that, all of those things, all the things that cause panic.

387 The swimmer's teacher reiterated the importance of anticipating problems when travelling
388 and helping athletes to proactively plan for them, explaining:

389 I think we've been quite active in making Lisa realise as well that she needs to be
390 keeping the staff onside if you know what I mean, regarding making sure that she keeps
391 them up to speed on when she's not going to be around and any work is caught up.

392 By anticipating potential problems and proactively providing or suggesting solutions, athletes
393 were supported to manage the pressures associated with their two careers.

394 **Demonstrate a belief in the value of education and the benefits of a dual career.**

395 Athletes' support network provided a consistent demonstration of the importance of education
396 and the value of maintaining a dual career. For example, Dillon's father said, "I think it's
397 [education] really important and I have done from the beginning and the reason is I sum it up
398 by saying 'nobody likes a sick ex-tennis player.'" Similarly, the mother of a hockey player
399 (Sofia) suggested, "A good education will set you in good stead...it's just something as a
400 family that we, we feel strong about." The manner in which this belief was demonstrated
401 varied across participants, with some placing slightly more emphasis on education than
402 others. For instance, in tennis and football, members of the support team indicated that
403 education was important, but it could be returned to at a later date; whereas in swimming and
404 field hockey (traditionally associated with less financial reward) education was viewed as a
405 "non-negotiable". Nevertheless, the consistent belief across the support team that continuing
406 with education was beneficial seemed to be particularly important in helping athletes maintain

409 [maintaining school and sport]...I think it can be easy for the teacher to say education is
410 the first thing you do, and it can also be easy for the coach to say that sport should be
411 your first thing you do. I think neither of those are true...all sides they just need to make
412 sure that the kids stay on track on both.

413 Furthermore, the support team and the athlete valuing education seemed particularly
414 helpful because it prevented athletes from feeling conflicted. As Cally (a hockey player) said,
415 “Yeah, I think its [valuing education] really important because I want to go to university and
416 stuff, I want to be in physiotherapy and they [my support network] know and support that.”
417 Further, with everyone on the same page it helped to ensure that everyone’s expectations were
418 the same, which eased tension within the support network. This appeared to be particularly
419 helpful for parents as a performance lifestyle advisor for tennis said, “I think if you have
420 coaches that encourage it [education] then that gives the parents a bit of relief in knowing that
421 the coach will support them as well.”

422 In some of the sports, the value on education was demonstrated through specific support
423 behaviors, such as members of the support team monitoring athletes’ engagement in their
424 academic work and holding athletes accountable for their attainment in this field. For
425 example, explaining what helped with her education Niamh (a tennis player) explained that if
426 she fell behind with her studies, her coach and tutor would say, “you have got to miss a
427 couple of [training] sessions to get myself back where I needed to be.” The players viewed
428 such monitoring positively because it kept them on track. As a footballer, Brody, said:

429 Before the season starts, the club will talk to people at school to make sure I do have
430 their permission to leave but also they have stopped people leaving school if they are
431 falling behind, so that also shows how important they think education is, it’s good.

434 opportunities to complete their education and training, with minimal barriers. Quite simply, as
435 Participant 3 said in relation to his shooting and school career, members of the support
436 network must, “Make everything very convenient for the athlete I think.” For such
437 opportunities to arise, athletes indicated being dependent upon their education establishments
438 to facilitate engagement in sport and sporting communities to support and enable academic
439 engagement. Support from parents was perceived to play a critical role, as Harry’s dad shared:

440 There has been a lot of sacrifice involved and a lot of travelling up and down...but I said
441 to myself I am not going to let my boys not have what I didn’t have [i.e., opportunities
442 to excel in sport], at least I can give them support.

443 Alongside the support for sport, significant others also provided support to succeed at
444 school. Such support was apparent through flexible timetabling at school to facilitate football
445 training, as Brody’s head of year explained, “So what we did is we went through his
446 timetable, we identified slots on a weekly basis where I can move him from his lessons.”

447 Additionally, parents or the Sports Federation facilitating access to tutors was seen as one of
448 the most beneficial types of support for athletes in both study phases. Tutors were valued for
449 various reasons, as a swimmer, Participant 5, stated, “I think the tutoring helped a lot of
450 swimmers at the time because when they were swimming without them they were not able to
451 focus on education.” Athletes who spent extended time away from school for training and
452 competitions (e.g., tennis players, sailors) particularly valued tutors.

453 On returning home from trips away, assistance from schools and parents was deemed to
454 be extremely important in helping athletes to catch up on work. For example, Participant 9
455 shared her experience of returning from skiing trips saying:

456 I would come home as an athlete on Sunday night but Monday morning I was a normal

459

missed was definitely a massive, massive help.

460 Overall, the removal of barriers and presentation of opportunities appeared to be largely
461 dependent upon a collective effort across the support network, with clear roles and
462 responsibilities and regular communication across sport and education domains (discussed in
463 further detail under the factors section).

464 **Create an autonomy-supportive environment to foster independence.** Finally, there
465 appeared to be a belief across the sports that athletes needed to have control over their
466 education and sport decisions. Participant 3, the shooter, shared:

467 It was all about my responsibility I think the personal approach is the key because then
468 you can face someone and you can speak on your behalf and then it's much more valued
469 than if you send someone else to do that for you, so my mum she was helping with the
470 administration let's say she helped kind of sending letters or whatever, but the most
471 important stuff it was on my shoulders.

472 Similarly, one of the swimmers, Participant 7 said, "When I got to the age where I would go
473 and talk to the teachers then they kind of respected that and they helped me do what I needed
474 to do to prepare for being away for two weeks, or whatever it was."

475 In some situations such control was demonstrated by significant others trusting athletes
476 to guide their own development, while in other sports it was through the active development
477 of independence in athletes. For example, Niamh explained, "I wanted to try and focus more
478 on the kind of the tennis side, that was kind of my decision this year, so I decided to stay and
479 play and see how it goes really." Dillon's mother expressed a similar view in relation to
480 moving Dillon to the tennis academy, "I would ask him and he'd say, 'No I don't want to go
481 to an academy full time yet,' so we waited ...I think we've always let Dillon lead the way."

484 she needs it, it's not that its being provided as such, but she knows that we are here and
485 available and she can use us if and when she needs to." By trusting athletes to make the
486 decisions that worked for them, the support network not only ensured the players felt in
487 control of their choices but also that they would be happy with the choices. In relation to her
488 swimming, Lisa explained:

489 Well you've taken your information and now it's down to you and if you want to do it
490 then you do it and if you don't do it then don't moan when you don't do well. Like I
491 think that's the sort of approach she [mother] has sometimes. Which is, I think that sort
492 of makes me do it even more, knowing that they like trust me to do it.

493 However, although athletes were trusted to make their own decisions, the guidance of their
494 support network helped athletes make informed decisions. As Hannah's father explained in
495 relation to her swimming and school:

496 I leave the choices to them tell you the truth, because I'll say it's your choice, but I'll
497 spell out the consequence that if you make this choice then this is what'll most probably
498 happen, but I'll leave it ultimately down to them.

499 **Key Factors for Optimizing Support**

500 To enable significant others to provide the aforementioned support, it appeared that
501 three factors were important. Namely, participants indicated that, (a) focusing on the whole
502 person, (b) integrating efforts within the support network, and (c) fostering a culture that
503 promotes continuing education, would enable optimal support from their network.

504 **Focus on the whole person.** First participants reflected on the importance of the
505 support network focusing upon developing a whole person, rather than their sport or
506 schooling career individually. As a swimmer, Participant 7, explained in relation to coaches:

509 whole person, they haven't just succeeded at school or being a good person, they've
510 succeeded as being a better athlete because they understand things better.

511 Another swimmer, Participant 8, argued for valuing all dimensions of an athlete, explaining,
512 "I think that we need to be looking at the athlete as you know emotionally, socially, mentally
513 ...you know the five dimensions." Such views were reiterated by a tennis coach, who shared,
514 "the advice is that you develop not just a tennis player, but a whole person and surprisingly if
515 you do that it actually adds to the other areas." By adopting such an approach, pressure on
516 athletes' sporting or education careers were reduced as they remained in perspective.

517 Participants perceived that the focus upon the whole person and a dual career needed to
518 extend to Sports Federations. For instance, based on a lack of support from her Federation
519 Participant 1, a sailor, explained:

520 [Federations] should be saying, "we don't force anyone to do studies, but if there are
521 students who feel the need [to study] for the future or their career, we will provide some
522 tools and some support". But they don't and that for me was the most frustrating.

523 Overall, summing up the views of many, Participant 8 explained why federations should
524 focus on the whole person, stating, "I think that the organizations have a duty of care to make
525 sure that their athletes are going to be okay once they leave the squad."

526 **Integrated efforts within the support network.** To optimize support, and particularly
527 to remove barriers to a dual career and increase a belief in education, individuals in the
528 support network needed to work together rather than in isolation. As Dillon's tennis coach
529 explained in relation to being on the same page as Dillon's tutor:

530 I need to know where he's at, what progress he's making and a little bit about, what is
531 he being asked to do at the moment, what is the workload like, what should he be doing

534 The tutor generated the need for joined up thinking, stating, “We try and encourage them
535 [players] to do work when they’re away and if I know the coach who is away with them,
536 making sure that they know that they should be doing work and stuff.” Such an integrated
537 approach was possible because individuals engaged in frequent and open communication.

538 Participants also discussed the importance of parents and athletes working together. As
539 the badminton player, Participant 6, explained:

540 The biggest support they [parents] gave to me was that you always had a very awkward
541 conversation, they sat down with me, they tried to understand where I was coming
542 from, and they always tried to work out solutions that works for both...we tried to find
543 a solution, and that’s the best support of all.

544 In addition, participants valued parents and coaches providing similar messages. For instance,
545 a swimmer, Participant 7, said, “I think that [support for education] can also come from
546 coaches, not just parents, because some athletes will know sometimes it’s better coming from
547 someone else than mum and dad you know, you listen to it a bit better.” Summarizing the
548 importance of an integrated approach, a sport psychologist explained:

549 Athletes can be feeling the pressure from everyone, making sure she has the right
550 balance but nobody communicating with each other; they are all just telling her what the
551 expectations are from their angle rather than sitting down and working out the best thing
552 for that individual. I think that’s the toughest one with sport and education.

553 **Foster a culture of expectation around continuing education.** Finally, participants
554 emphasized the importance/benefit of members of the support network fostering a culture in
555 which continuing education is an expectation – something that is not questioned. For many of
556 the athletes, an expectation of continuing education was created by parents, as Participant 3 (a

559 my parents to study well. Participant 7, one of the swimmers, extended this point, stating, it
560 was never a question for my family of whether I was going [to school and university], ...it
561 was just an assumption....So I think that helped - the not questioning it.”

562 When or if such a culture extended to the sport or society, it appeared to be particularly
563 helpful in supporting athletes’ conversations with coaches, as Participant 6 said about his
564 badminton coach, “I didn’t have to really negotiate my education [with my coach] because of
565 the culture and mentality of my country.” In contrast, one of the tennis coaches reiterated the
566 importance of a cultural change in tennis in the UK, explaining, “it’s about developing a
567 different culture in this country; people are out of school a lot and the majority of them
568 shouldn’t be because they’re never going to make it as tennis players anyway.”

569 Such national expectations towards continuing education were not always without
570 challenges though, as Participant 5 explained:

571 I went to the Olympics and then after coming back there was just some discussion with
572 the association that you know I was going to University next year, so he’s not going to
573 swim any more. They just assumed I would give up swimming, so I assumed the same.

574 Additionally, Participant 7 explained that sport also needs to be valued:

575 I think if you took a poll right now most people in [country] would say no that’s [sport]
576 not a job, my child needs to stay in school and have his education or her education is
577 way more important than sport. So that’s a cultural mindset that we have to try and say,
578 “okay we understand and we get that, and we’re not saying that education isn’t
579 important but the two and two could work together.”

580 Overall participants perceived that sport and social culture towards education influenced the
581 extent to which they were able to obtain support necessary to maintain their dual career.

584 network in facilitating a dual career in sport and education, and, (b) gain insights into factors
585 that may optimize the provision of such support. The key intention was to engage in a more
586 rigorous understanding of the characteristics of support provided by the 'team around the
587 athlete' by investigating the experiences of dual career management from the perspectives of
588 athletes and their social support network. Such viewpoints not only included current, high
589 performing adolescent athletes and their identified support team, but also retired elite,
590 international athletes who had pursued a dual career pathway.

591 **Roles of the Support Network**

592 One of the most striking elements to emerge from the results was the level of
593 understanding needed from the support team with respect to the explicit demands of elite
594 sport, education, and the interchange between the two achievement domains. To provide
595 effective support parents, teachers, coaches, and organizational support staff demonstrated
596 high levels of 'contextual intelligence' (Brown, Gould, & Foster, 2005) and a cognitive
597 awareness of the stressors faced by the elite student-athlete (cf. Brown et al., 2015; Debois et
598 al., 2014). When members of the network lacked such contextual awareness, athletes and
599 others experienced more challenges in their attempts to engage in a dual career or to support
600 such attempts. Such contextual intelligence appeared to be most apparent in settings where
601 there was a cultural (both within society and sport) acceptance of dual careers (e.g.,
602 swimming in the UK) likely due to the greater experience of the support team in this domain.

603 The results further highlight the need for perceived social support to be present in all its
604 multidimensional forms (cf. Rees & Hardy, 2000). For example, parents and teachers
605 appeared to possess a consistent degree of readiness to offer tangible and logistical support
606 with a clear emphasis on being solution-focused and an adaptable, proactive ability to plan in

609 simultaneous challenges (Hartwood & Knight, 2015). Such efforts were evident across the
610 idiosyncratic demands linked to specific sport types (e.g., international travel-school conflict
611 in tennis versus daily training schedule-school conflict in swimming) and showcased the
612 cognitive skills of network members in terms of anticipation, planning and adaptation.

613 Insights into the types of facilitative environment created by the support network
614 resonated with the principles of basic needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002) in that athletes were
615 presented with autonomy-supportive opportunities to engage in developmental tasks and
616 organizational activities independently. In addition, care to ensure that athletes felt like they
617 could own their own journey and decisions about sport involvement were afforded by parents
618 (Knight & Holt, 2014). Underpinned by collective contributions from all members of the
619 support network, such an autonomy-supportive environment seems to offer a sense of how
620 athletes may be able to optimize their self-regulation as individuals managing the integrated
621 transitions between sport participation and schoolwork/education.

622 **Factors that Optimize Support Provision**

623 Through the integration of interviews from individuals involved in a variety of sports, in
624 various education and sport set-ups, and across a range of countries, we sought to identify key
625 factors that may influence or optimize the provision of support. Somewhat surprisingly, the
626 experiences and needs of individuals in different countries and different sport/education set-
627 ups appeared to be much more similar than they were different. Nevertheless, the overall data
628 set provide some intriguing insights into individual- and group-level factors that underscore
629 optimal support for aspiring athletes in a dual career reality. Importantly, when providing
630 effective support, the aforementioned support network attributes did not appear to exist in
631 isolation. Rather, these attributes existed across members who collaborated in manners that

634 broader group-level support as all network members supported each other. Such support
635 enabled the entire network to be 'on message' with respect to supporting each other's
636 decisions, subsequently reducing any confusion the athlete might experience from mixed
637 messages or differential value judgements. Such a finding is consistent with Henriksen and
638 colleagues (2010a), who have highlighted that integrated efforts are a critical characteristic of
639 successful athletic talent development environments (ATDEs). Resonating with Martindale,
640 Collins, and Daubney's (2005) reinforcement of coherent philosophies within a TDE, these
641 findings accentuate the importance of sports federations facilitating stronger integration
642 among different members of athletes' support network (cf., Harwood & Knight, 2015).

643 Notable features of the support network exalted by athletes and reinforced by members
644 was the implicit belief in the dual values of sport and education (cf. European Commission,
645 2011). Congruent beliefs in the pursuit of holistic athlete development and a grounded,
646 multidimensional identity (cf. Brewer, Petitpas, & Van Raalte, 2017) appeared to promote
647 behaviors in the support team that enabled the athlete to optimize engagement and
648 development in both domains. A perceptive observation by one retired elite athlete also
649 reflected how sociocultural expectations of the athlete valuing and continuing education were
650 not always 'a given' or assumed in certain countries; yet such societal and organizational
651 expectations (e.g., duty of care) were powerful and necessary in facilitating holistic
652 development and healthier personal identities (European Commission, 2011). Further, the
653 emphasis placed on sport versus education differed across some countries, sports
654 organizations/types of sports, and within families. In situations where the country or
655 organization placed less emphasis on education, family expectations around continuing
656 education were of even greater importance.

659 regarding influences on dual careers, the current study indicates that adolescent athletes
660 successful engagement in a dual career appears to be influenced by interactions at and across
661 varying environmental levels. In drawing together our findings alongside pre-existing
662 literature, we propose that an athlete's dual career experience is directly influenced by a range
663 of factors including the contextual intelligence, values, and beliefs of individual members of a
664 support team located within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Henriksen, 2010a, b).
665 Such contextual intelligence and behaviors of individuals appear to be individual
666 representations of the shared expectations and understanding of dual careers that the support
667 network possess. These representations may be reciprocally formed and informed through
668 consistent communication and interaction within the support network. Further still, such
669 values, expectations, and understanding may be more broadly influenced by the macro-level
670 culture (Henriksen, 2010a) created by individual national governing bodies and/or the societal
671 expectations that exist regarding engagement in education versus achieving success in sport.

672 **Limitations and Future Directions**

673 The current study provides important initial insights into how members of the support
674 team can support elite adolescent athletes as they attempt to complete their dual career.
675 However, such findings must be considered in light of the limitations of this study. Most
676 notably, the lack of negative examples included in the study and the limited experiences from
677 elite team sport athletes to guide the formulation of the findings. Moreover, the objective
678 educational success of the dual-career of the athletes were not explicitly measured (e.g.,
679 academic grades, school achievements) in stage one as the participants were in the middle of
680 completing their courses. For the purpose of this study, we defined successfully pursuing a
681 dual career pathway as achieving on the national or international stage in sport while

684 between countries and cultures so further examination of what a successful dual career
685 actually is, whether at an individual, national, or international level, would be beneficial.
686 Finally, the views of individuals from educational institutions were more limited within this
687 study due to the challenges of engaging with them. As such there is a greater emphasis on the
688 views of individuals from within the sporting context than the educational context within the
689 findings. To extend the findings of this study, longitudinal studies incorporating the views of
690 all members of the support network would be beneficial to illustrate how support must change
691 and adapt across transitions and challenging points in the academic/sporting calendar. Further,
692 studies with athletes who were not able to complete a dual-career would help to more clearly
693 articulate the nature and consequences of support, or lack thereof.

694 **Conclusion**

695 The findings of this study provide a clear indication of the breadth and depth of
696 support required by adolescent athletes to maintain a dual career. Most importantly, it appears
697 that in addition to providing support to athletes, members within the athletes' support network
698 must also support each other and share similar beliefs and expectations regarding sport and
699 education. Such shared expectations and beliefs are more likely to be possible if a culture in
700 which continuing education is accepted and supported within sport is fostered, but this is
701 likely to be influenced by societal values towards sport and education. Overall, it appears that
702 identification of specific roles and responsibilities to be fulfilled by each member of a support
703 network, as well as an identification of the sporting and educational demands and goals of
704 athletes would be useful to guide support for a dual career during adolescence.

⁵ In the UK sample, this was classed as a minimum of C grades in English, Maths, and Science at GCSE level as this is usually required as a minimum to engage in further and subsequently higher education.

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Table 1

Stage 1 Participant Details

Setting	Athlete One	Athlete 2	So
Tennis academy	Dillon ¹ is a 15-year-old male international tennis player. Dillon has frequently represented Great Britain at competitions around the world. Dillon has been at the academy for two years and has been completing two GCSE qualifications a year. He is currently completing further GCSE qualifications and a BTEC.	Niamh is a 17-year-old female international tennis player. Niamh is currently transitioning from junior to senior competitions. Niamh has been with this academy for the last five years. Niamh has recently completed her GCSE qualifications and is currently enrolled in a BTEC and an A' level course.	Di
High performance swimming squad	Lisa is a 15-year-old international swimmer, who has represented her country for the last two years. Lisa is currently completing her GCSE qualifications at a traditional school. Lisa will continue education into higher education to start her A level exams next year.	Hannah is a 17-year-old international swimmer, who has represented her country in a number of national and international competitions. Hannah is currently completing her A level exams, having finished her AS levels in the previous year. She is striving to achieve the highest grades in her A' levels.	Li

¹ To protect the identity of the athletes, pseudonyms are used throughout this manuscript

National field hockey squad	Sofia is a 15-year-old international field hockey player. She has competed for her country in a number of international age group events and is a regular member of the under 16 and 18 national squad. She has been part of the national squad for the last two. Her father is also her coach. Sofia is currently studying for her GCSE qualifications within a traditional education system.	Cally is a 16-year-old international field hockey player. She has competed for her country in a number of international age group events and is a regular member of the under 18 national squad and also the senior squad. Cally is currently studying for her A' level qualifications within a traditional education system. Her club training takes place in the evenings around her schooling with national training occurring monthly.
A football academy	Brody is a 16-year-old academy football player. He has been playing with the academy for six years. He is currently completing his GCSE exams at a local secondary school. He attends the academy for two afternoons a week (on day release) and trains three evenings a week/plays games at the weekend. He has an opportunity to attend educational sessions at the academy to make up the work he misses.	Harry is an 18-year-old academy football player. He attends the academy full-time having completed his GCSE exams at a traditional school almost two years ago. He completes 12 hours of education at the academy and will obtain a BTEC qualification at the end of this year. He trains every day except for Wednesdays and plays matches at the weekend.

Table 2

Participant demographics

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age (years)</u>	<u>Highest Education</u>	<u>Other</u>
Athletes	8	5 female 3 male	15-18 (M=16.1)	4 completing GCSES 4 completing A'levels/BTEC	6 in 2 si All
Parents	13	6 female 7 male	39-67 (M = 49.9)	3 Masters degree 2 graduate diploma 4 undergraduate degrees 2 vocational training/diploma 2 high school leaving qualifications	
Coaches/ Team managers	7*	7 male	26-56 (M=38.4)	7 undergraduate degrees	
Teachers/Tutors	6	1 female 5 male	25-37 (M = 31.7)	6 undergraduate degrees	
Sport scientists /advisors	7	2 female 5 male		3 PhD 2 MSc 2 undergraduate degree	3 sp 2 p 1 e 1 p

*One coach was also a parent

- Examines the role of athletes' support network in facilitating a dual career
- Two-stage qualitative study combining interviews from current and former athletes
- Role of support network is to recognize dual career athletes' needs, anticipate problems, remove barriers, and value education.
- It is also beneficial if the support network create an autonomy-supportive environment.
- Factors that facilitate support include focusing on the whole person and integrated efforts across the network
- Fostering a culture that promotes continuing education is also valuable.

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