



Dual career management for athletes

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ABOUT ME

Born and raised in the small city of Botevgrad, Bulgaria, I knew that if I wanted something big out of my life, I should go out in the world.

I was a rather talented basketball player at the age of 17, playing for the national team, and eventually able to pursue a basketball career in Denmark, Norway, Hawaii and Kentucky in the USA, then back to Denmark.

As a young athlete, I had a pretty serious injury. And during my four months of rehabilitation, I realised that I may fall short of playing basketball forever and to make a serious living out of it.

So during my basketball years I set a price on my education. I finished my Bachelor in Business in the USA and instead of solely pursuing a professional basketball career, I returned to Denmark where I could combine it with a Master's Degree in International Marketing and Management from Copenhagen Business School. Having to miss classes to spend a lot of time on the basketball court, I knew that my way into the business world had to be gradual. I had to start getting away from my basketball player identity and building my business identity.

Transitioning to my business identity was a slow process. Undertaking working internships before moving to a part time job led me to the opportunity of working for Siemens Wind Power as an Internal Project Manager. It took quite a lot of effort to complete these work experiences in a year and a half while still combining it with professional basketball and completing my Master's Degree. After I finished my Master's thesis I stopped working at Siemens Wind Power and focused on another year of basketball.

Meanwhile I run my company Dual Career Consulting, where I want to help athletes, sport clubs, agents and educational organisations to become

more aware of transition challenges that come along in the life of an athlete. I aim to help avoid the aftermath of the sudden and unforeseen or even planned career stop for athletes. When I started, I still felt quite inexperienced so I started working in Trade and Marketing for the biggest shipping company in the world —Maersk Line.

THE BALANCING ACT

The main perception about balancing two careers at once is that it is an excessive expectation. Sport performance is in fact boosted by a well-balanced lifestyle combining study, training, work, social relationships and spiritual well-being. Balancing these important layers in the athlete lifestyle helps the ability to focus and achieve goals. Athletes should aim to balance their lifestyles as it will help them become the best athletes possible. It is challenging of course because there are only 24 hours in each day; but with focus and clear objectives athletes can achieve these goals one by one.

The secret of balancing two career pathways are having a good attitude and an 'I can do it' approach to education, sport and work. It's this which will deliver enhanced individual sport achievements. Out-of-sport accomplishments help to put less pressure on and enhance, sport achievements while enhancing post-athletic career opportunities. In terms of the balance, it is important to think of the 'whole person approach' with a focus on the life span perspective of the person. These approaches could be career development (sport and non-sport), talent development (sport and non-sport) and improving transitions between the different spheres of the personal life.

TRANSITIONS

The transition from one career (sport) to another career (business) is usually the hardest. It means changing assumptions about oneself (identity) and this requires a corresponding change in one's

behaviour and relationships. From my experience, adaptation and transition will take on average from one to two years. It is different for every individual—and it is experienced differently. It's therefore important to have organisations and professionals who can help athletes (among others like musicians, singers etc.) deal with transitions and make it a positive experience.

CAREER TRANSITION DYNAMICS

The starting point for athletes to successfully manage their career transition is for them to acknowledge and be mindful that a forthcoming career transition is imminent; then to work on and develop the necessary resources for effectively coping with this event.

Many athletes are forced to stop their sporting career by injuries. It's therefore preferable to start preparing early. In my case I understood the importance of education and continuously pursued professional career development. I had to develop and effectively use all the necessary resources at hand and to overcome the change of my core identity (the basketball player). Athletes are usually dominated by their glorified-self at the expense of them investing in their other identity dimensions including academic, social, and career oriented-selves. This role devotion excludes the multidimensionality of their identities and their ability to successfully transition from the athlete to other roles following retirement.

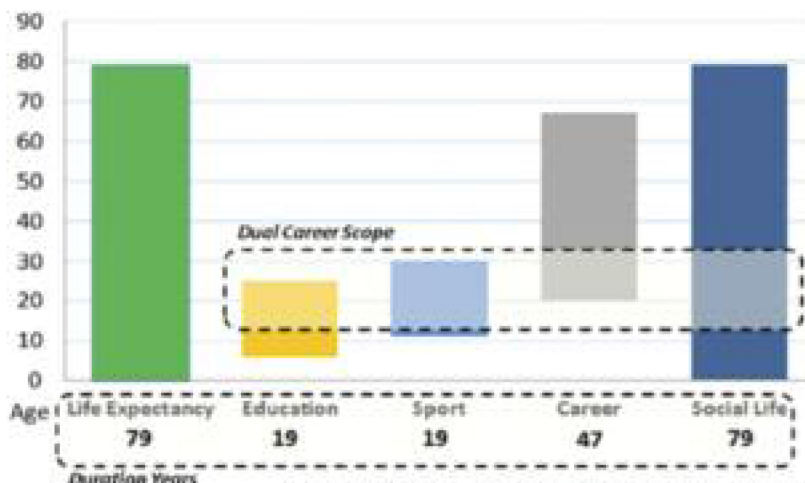
Transition preparation also involves developing a balanced personality. It is a huge indicator for a successful transition though usually far easier said than done. After all, athletes want to give their best for athletic advancement while they are still in their prime and have the physical abilities.

After a professional sport career, the athlete may have feelings of loss and sadness and in most cases, will still plan further sport involvement. At the point of retirement, athletes are still forming their new self-identity by actively exploring their interests out of sport. Some of the things that could help athletes after their sport retirement are education, extra training, work experience, hobbies, professional interests, and family.

It is hard to have a complete plan for one's career and future but immediate plans after sport retirement are better than nothing. This is also the time where

This graph illustrates the importance of career focus as in average, it represent 40–50 years of one's life. Also notice the overlap of education with sport career where one should take the major steps for personal/future development.

WHY DUAL CAREER MANAGEMENT



the athletes notice that they are being perceived differently by others which will start shaping their new self-identity.

The first year after sport retirement is the hardest period for an athlete. It's the year they have to get on with their life and get accustomed to a new lifestyle with a new self-identity. During this time, it is important to focus on the future career path rather than dragging out past athletic achievements. Looking post-retirement, the former athletes interact with people who know nothing of their prior athletic abilities and achievements, and who do not identify them as retired athletes. Interactions with people who do not tie the athletes to their former selves contribute to better quality of the transition. Another benefit I have found to ease the process, is for retired athletes to give attention to different physical activities and sports to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.

ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

I've mentioned the main challenges and issues that might prevent an athlete of making a 'good' transition into the post-sport career world. Besides this, there is another factor in the equation.

Educational institutions, sport organisations and businesses are all mainly focused on their structural functionality and often forget to support athletes; they should be more open to dual career support and have supportive structural systems in place.

It is important that an educational institution support the athletes in

obtaining a good education to enable them to prosper in their athletic career and move on to the labor force. Targeted involvement will result in less drop-outs while increasing academic achievement. Sport organisations also, should recognise and put a focus on the athlete's involvement in education and continuously encourage it.

Businesses too, could take an alternative position when evaluating former athletes and not only focus on working experience but on the qualities and 'soft skills' that the athlete possesses that will development their work experiences. I have seen that the main challenge is the lack of cooperation between academic institutions and sport. Furthermore, if they have an established link with businesses that supports athletes move into their post-athletic career, it could improve the process for the athlete 'whole Person' development.

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