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Entrepreneurship, Education, and Athletes: Entrepreneurship Within European Dual Career Programmes



Louis Moustakas, Lisa Kalina, Antonio Sánchez-Pato, Elena Conde, and Håkon Ege

Abstract Balancing competitive sport and post-athletic career development is an inherently challenging endeavour for European athletes. In response, numerous countries and sport federations have developed dual career support policies and programmes. These programmes have principally focused on connecting athletes with education or employment opportunities or developing more general life skills. There has also been a growing focus on entrepreneurship's potential as a dual career pathway. University and advocacy work has called for the integration of entrepreneurship, and many pan-European projects have emerged on the topic. Nonetheless, entrepreneurship is mostly absent from dual career policies and programmes. This absence is especially notable given the potential of entrepreneurship as both an economic driver and a viable pathway for athletes. Using extensive findings generated from the SENTA project, this chapter, therefore, argues for the relevance of entrepreneurship within the context of athlete dual careers. In particular, we highlight how athletes may be uniquely well-positioned to thrive as entrepreneurs and how entrepreneurship can actively contribute to economic growth. Correspondingly, we suggest numerous solutions to better recognise and integrate entrepreneurship with dual career programmes, ranging from educational offers to post-career support. Finally, we conclude by proposing future avenues for research and discussion around this topic.

L. Moustakas (✉) · L. Kalina

Institute for European Sport Development and Leisure Studies, German Sport University, Cologne, Germany

e-mail: L.Moustakas@dshs-koeln.de

A. Sánchez-Pato · E. Conde

Facultad de Deporte, Catholic University of Murcia, Murcia, Spain

H. Ege

FURIM Institut, Oslo, Norway

1 Introduction

The notion of a dual career for athletes involves engagement in both sports and work-related activities, such as employment, education, or training (European Commission, 2012). Athletic careers are relatively short, and most athletes do not make enough money to retire at the end of their sporting careers (Kenny, 2015). Therefore, athletes need to develop alternative skills while simultaneously pursuing their sporting careers. However, athletes face significant challenges successfully combining these two strands (Sánchez Pato et al., 2017). Balancing the intense demands of competitive sport with educational or professional development is inherently challenging. In addition, numerous factors contribute to accentuating this challenge, including navigating daily routines, differing levels of support, or negative prejudices towards athletes (Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015; Li & Sum, 2017). In short, successfully combining sporting and professional ambitions is something very few athletes achieve. For instance, more than a third of German athletes describe their financial futures as not being secured (Breuer & Wicker, 2010).

In response to these challenges, numerous countries and sport federations have developed dual career support programmes (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Morris et al., 2021; Sánchez Pato et al., 2017; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). These programmes have principally focused on connecting athletes with education or employment opportunities or developing more general life skills. For instance, the Olympic Committees in Spain or Germany have established programmes to improve the coordination of academic studies and competitive sports (Asociación Deportes Olímpicos, 2021; Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund, 2013). However, outside of the scope of state- or federation-led programmes, there has been a growing focus on entrepreneurship's potential as a dual career pathway. University and advocacy work has called for the integration of entrepreneurship as part of dual career programmes (EU Athletes, 2015; Hakkers, 2019), and many pan-European projects have emerged on the topic (e.g. FH Joanneum University of Applied Sciences, 2017; Furim Institut, 2019; TwIn, 2019). Yet entrepreneurship is mostly absent from European policy (European Commission, 2012) and national programmes (Morris et al., 2021; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Participation in sport can help develop numerous skills and networks essential to successful entrepreneurship, and athlete entrepreneurship can be an important driver of growth and innovation, but further tailored support is needed to capitalise on these opportunities (Kenny, 2015).

In the following, we aim to highlight the need, opportunities, and limitations associated with entrepreneurship education and support in the context of athlete dual careers and propose concrete avenues for integrating entrepreneurship within dual career programmes. In short, we wish to bridge the gap between these projects and current dual career athlete programmes. These reflections are based on national literature reviews, surveys, and focus groups done across eight countries as part of the Social Entrepreneurship-focused SENTA project. In total, we have interviewed over 40 national-level athletes and received nearly 300 survey responses. Therefore,

though this chapter is discursive in nature, it still relies on extensive research and data collection.

Moving forward, we will first present the current status of entrepreneurship within athlete dual career programmes and policy. Afterwards, we will discuss the need and opportunities for entrepreneurship education and support within athlete dual careers and current obstacles impeding the realisation of those opportunities. Finally, we will bring these parts together and suggest future directions for entrepreneurship within dual career programmes and research. In addition, throughout, we will include the results of our research to concretely illustrate the place of entrepreneurship within the development of dual career athletes.

2 Dual Career Programmes and Entrepreneurship

The notion of a dual career for athletes involves engagement in both sports and work-related activities, such as employment or training (European Commission, 2012). However, athletes face significant challenges successfully combining these two activities. As detailed above, navigating daily routines, managing tight schedules, differing institutional support levels, or even negative prejudices towards athletes can all add significant difficulty in balancing dual careers (Geraniosova & Ronkainen, 2015; Li & Sum, 2017; Sánchez Pato et al., 2017). Indeed, numerous barriers can make it difficult to properly harmonize dual careers, such as the characteristics of the sport itself, the level of competition, access to resources, or the availability of support (López de Subijana et al., 2014). Acknowledging and responding to these challenges, an increasing focus on dual or post-athletic career development has been seen in Europe over the last decade, with a growing number of policies, programmes, and organisations working to create long-lasting career possibilities for athletes.

Most notably, in 2012, the European Commission published the *EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes*, providing the first-ever European level recognition and guidance on the topic. These guidelines were crafted to support the development of national dual career guidelines and primarily focus on employment, education, health, and financial support (European Commission, 2012). Despite these guidelines, at the national level, policies and programmes are fragmented across a wide range of actors, including state actors, sport federations, educational institutions, defence institutions, and others. In some cases, some level of dual career provision is even enshrined in law. In Poland, for example, elite athletes are guaranteed a place in physical education Universities, and Olympic medallists are ensured life-long pensions (Kuettel et al., 2020). Elsewhere, many policies and programmes are designed and led by national sport authorities such as sport confederations or Olympic committees. For instance, Germany offers multiple education-related initiatives and policies related to dual careers. Elite athletes wanting to combine work and study receive support when they go to the army, the police, the fire brigade, or customs (Hottenrott & Braumann, 2015). There have also been attempts to integrate

elite sport into schools, but these attempts have faced numerous limitations and obstacles (Borggreffe & Cachay, 2012).

At the broader, European level, Aquilina and Henry (2010) worked to classify European countries based on the national approach to supporting dual career athletes in higher education. In their study, four distinct categories were mapped out: state-centric regulation, whereby the government regulates higher education institutions to support student-athletes (e.g. Spain); the state as a facilitator, where the government promotes formal, non-binding agreements to support dual career athletes (e.g. Finland and Sweden); national sporting federations as intermediaries that act on behalf of student-athletes to facilitate support (e.g. the United Kingdom); and a *laissez-faire* approach with no formal structures or arrangements (e.g. Slovenia). In our project, regional differences were likewise identified. While a large number of specifications and regulations related to elite athletes exist in many of the project countries (e.g. Spain, Germany, Austria), others are fragmented or have a specific focus on aspects such as a healthy lifestyle or talent scouting (e.g. Romania). Beyond the above education-focused taxonomy, many distinct organisations are involved in the provision of dual careers services. In particular, Morris et al. (2021) identified eight common types across Europe: (1) sports-friendly schools, (2) elite sport schools/colleges, (3) private club programs, (4) sport-friendly universities, (5) combined dual career systems, (6) national sports programs, (7) defence force programs, and (8) players' union programs.

What is clear from these different country and European-level analyses is that the inclusion of entrepreneurship in policy and programme design is mainly absent, leaving it to individual projects and organizations to fill this gap. Looking again to Germany, we see, for example, that the Werte Stiftung, together with German Sports Aid, has launched a start-up academy to introduce athletes to the subject of entrepreneurship. The programme supports athletes interested in founding a start-up business after their athletic career or aspiring to become an entrepreneur (Wertestiftung, 2021). Similarly, at the European level, many have called for the integration of entrepreneurship-related offers as part of dual career programmes (EU Athletes, 2015; Hakkers, 2019), and numerous pan-European education projects have emerged on the topic (FH Joanneum University of Applied Sciences, 2017; Furim Institut, 2019; TwIn, 2019). In general, these cross-national projects work with higher education institutions and sport organisations to assess athletes' entrepreneurship needs and develop corresponding online learning tools to address these needs. For instance, the AtletyC project created a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to foster general entrepreneurship skills and networks for athletes (FH Joanneum University of Applied Sciences, 2017), whereas the SENTA project developed a gamification-based course related to social entrepreneurship for athletes (Furim Institut, 2019).

Taken as a whole, the current dual career landscape and the myriad of individual entrepreneurship-related projects suggest there is a significant gap in the structure and offers of dual career options. European policy and national programmes largely dismiss entrepreneurship, yet there is a growing recognition of entrepreneurship's value for dual career athletes. Ultimately, this leaves a range of individual actors to

offer a disparate range of education programmes and short-term projects. As we will discuss next, there are significant opportunities and obstacles associated with better education and support around entrepreneurship in the dual career context. Entrepreneurship can be a meaningful pathway for many athletes and, for some, it is even a current, lived reality. In turn, athlete entrepreneurship can make a significant economic and societal contribution and prove to be a worthwhile investment for countries looking to boost innovation and employment. However, numerous barriers stand in the way of unlocking this potential.

3 Opportunities and Obstacles for Entrepreneurship and Dual Careers

At their heart, dual career programmes are meant to support athletes in combining their athletic careers with the development of long-term, post-athletic careers. On that basis alone, excluding entrepreneurship from dual career programmes is a rather significant oversight. Around 14% of the European adult population works on a self-employed basis (Eurostat, 2019), and the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* estimates that early-stage entrepreneurial activity (i.e. the percentage of the 18–64-year-old population who are either a nascent entrepreneur or are owner-manager of a new business) is at around 10% (Bosma et al., 2020). In short, entrepreneurship is a significant driver of economic activity and could represent an important opportunity for many athletes.

Many athletes expressed keen interest in entrepreneurial activities during our focus group discussions and viewed it as a potential future avenue in our work. Some even had reasonably clear ideas of what kind of entrepreneurial venture they would like to develop: ‘My idea is to work in the field of consulting with a focus on personal management’ (Athlete, Germany). Many others, either by planning or chance, had already become involved in some form of entrepreneurial activity. In Romania, for example, one participant spoke of starting a restaurant while, in Germany, another mentioned how she needed to register as a small business owner to process sponsorship and other revenues: ‘We as athletes have to establish our own GbR to save taxes and acquire sponsors’ (Athlete, Germany). Regardless of the country, there was a clear consensus that more information, education, and structures were needed to support athletes’ entrepreneurial journeys. Later in this chapter, we will propose concrete ways how national authorities and sports federation can support entrepreneurship in the context of dual career programmes. However, before doing so, we must first make the case as to why that is a worthwhile investment for individual athletes and the broader community. Thus, in the following, we will highlight how entrepreneurship support can benefit both athletes and their communities.

From a societal and economic point of view, supporting athlete entrepreneurship can represent a good investment. Athlete entrepreneurship can be an important

engine of growth for the sport industry (Ratten, 2018) and, overall, entrepreneurship can help promote innovation and economic growth (e.g. Bosma et al., 2018). Indeed, in Europe, youth unemployment hovers at around 17% and, in some countries, can reach almost 50% (Eurostat, 2020), highlighting the need for innovation and entrepreneurship to help tackle these challenges. Numerous studies suggest that athletes are especially well-suited to (sport) entrepreneurship and can generate positive economic impacts (Nauright & Wiggins, 2020; Ratten, 2015, 2018). Athletes interact with many people from different sectors in competitions and social events throughout their sporting life. This allows them to create wide networks that can be valuable for later entrepreneurial activities (Kenny, 2015). As Ansari et al. (2020) note, the connection between sport and a range of sectors ‘such as media, data analytics, athletes and fan experiences, as well as goods and services, offers countless opportunities for entrepreneurial activities in different segments’. In addition, athletes develop numerous entrepreneurship-related skills during their careers. Though more work needs to be done to better understand athlete entrepreneurship skills, recent studies suggest that athletes develop numerous entrepreneurship skills (Matsangos et al., 2020; Steinbrink et al., 2020). In fact, our focus group participants often reflected on how the skills and contacts acquired during their careers could help support an entrepreneurial venture. Numerous interviewees highlighted how sport helped them acquire skills such as discipline, perseverance, teamwork, and communication. In addition, the opportunity to connect with influential or wealthy individuals through sport was highlighted: ‘an important tool during my career was interaction with people with money’ (Athlete, Romania). Overall, these skills and networks can prove to be incredibly beneficial when starting an entrepreneurial venture (Daley, 2012; Kenny, 2015). For instance, research has shown that similar job demands are associated with athletic careers and entrepreneurship, positioning athletes to be more successful with entrepreneurship as a second career choice (Steinbrink et al., 2020). Put together, these results support the contention that athletes can indeed be effective drivers of entrepreneurship. This athlete entrepreneurship, meanwhile, can act as an important driver of economic growth and support (youth) employment. Likewise, entrepreneurship can represent a viable, enticing career opportunity for athletes and allow them to capitalise on assets already acquired through their sporting careers. And, even if athletes do not specifically wish to venture into entrepreneurship, equipping athletes with a variety of entrepreneurial skills and competencies is essential for their future professional career. Skills such as flexibility, communication, and creativity are vital and it is crucial for elite athletes to be able to use these skills in their professional lives.

Yet, bridging the gap between athlete entrepreneurship’s *potential* to making it a reality requires a concerted effort by national authorities and dual career service providers. At the moment, many obstacles actively impede the realisation of this potential. First and foremost, athletes generally lack awareness and education on entrepreneurship as a potential dual career opportunity. A common theme across the discussions was that athletes felt that they ‘needed more information’ (Athlete, Bosnia), training, and support in developing their entrepreneurial skills. And, even when athletes were involved in entrepreneurial activities, this occurred in a rather

happenstance, learning-by-doing fashion: ‘There is no guideline on how to establish your sailing GbR (German business), it is rather learning by doing’ (Athlete, Germany). In other words, even though numerous athletes indicated some involvement in entrepreneurship, this involvement occurred due to their personal characteristics and contacts, not because it was actively supported or encouraged through dual career education or programming. Though there are increasing and interesting activities in this area—including the ‘European Sport Leadership Project’ (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2020) which aims to foster the athlete’s leadership and employability skills—overall, we see a lack of concerted activities from dual career service providers.

4 Connecting Entrepreneurship and Dual Career Programmes

As we have detailed above, an increasing array of actors is attempting to capitalise on entrepreneurship’s potential within athlete dual careers; however, European or national programmes have largely ignored this topic. In our view, this is a significant oversight, as entrepreneurship can provide many potential benefits for athletes and broader communities. There are numerous steps national authorities and dual career service providers can take to bridge this gap. First and foremost, recognition and integration of entrepreneurship in dual career policy are needed. Major European policy or national programmes rarely include entrepreneurship as a potential pathway. Explicit recognition and discussion of entrepreneurship as dual career possibilities are essential in addressing this gap. Furthermore, these policies and programmes should focus on integrating entrepreneurship education and support opportunities across the athletic lifespan.

National authorities and dual career service providers should provide a range of entrepreneurship support, and education offers suited to the different stages of an athlete’s lifespan. In particular, support and education activities should occur over three different periods: when athletes are still active in sport, when they have retired from sport and are preparing to find a new occupation for the first time, and, finally, when they already have an occupation in their post-sport career (B-WISER, 2018). Among other things, that means supporting athletes through their active, athletic years and formal education and providing vocational support and support throughout retirement (Morris et al., 2021).

During active sporting careers, one of the biggest challenges for entrepreneurship education programmes is to fit into athletes’ full, demanding schedules (Li & Sum, 2017). Nonetheless, it is imperative for athletes to begin laying the groundwork for their post-sporting careers at this stage. As such, tailored, flexible offers are required to match the realities and demands of athletic life (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; European Commission, 2012). Short, ‘bootcamp’ style courses, as well as online learning offers, can potentially help meet these requirements. Bootcamps are

cornerstones of contemporary start-up ecosystems (Koning, 2016). Bootcamps directly focus on teaching practical applications for launching and managing start-ups in a short period. The primary purpose of entrepreneurship bootcamp programs is to help entrepreneurs design and bring a new venture to life. In recent years there has been a growing trend of entrepreneurship bootcamps dedicated to this type of education and training across a variety of fields, including for military veterans and people with disabilities (Hoppenfeld et al., 2013; Shaheen, 2016). In short, given their flexible, adaptable, short-term nature, entrepreneurship bootcamps can be quite suitable for athletes to explore entrepreneurship. Furthermore, there is a growing literature around sport and athlete entrepreneurship education that can be tapped into to support programme design (e.g. Ansari et al., 2020; Kenny, 2015; Ratten & Jones, 2018). Along with in-person training, national authorities should develop locally relevant distance learning materials for athletes interested in entrepreneurship. At present, many online courses are built from pan-European projects and, therefore, cannot adequately address the legal, financial, and cultural realities associated with entrepreneurship in a given country.

Support should also continue at the end of one's athletic career. Tailored guidance and mentorship are needed to promote successful entrepreneurship. Though athletes may possess significant networks from their sporting lives, connections to the broader entrepreneurship environment should be made intentionally through training, networking, or mentorship programmes. As we have highlighted above, entrepreneurship skills must be purposefully enhanced through dual career programmes, including during and after an athlete's academic career. In turn, this support and training should encourage athletes to share their experiences with their peers and allow successful entrepreneur-athletes to act as mentors for athletes in earlier entrepreneurial stages. In other words, entrepreneurship programmes should not only concern themselves with developing relevant skills but also fostering opportunities for long-term networks and mentorship. We must not abandon athletes at the conclusion of their sporting career. The transition to the world of labour and business is a moment where athletes most need support—such training and mentorship schemes can help pave the way forward.

5 Future Lines of Research

Though we have highlighted the opportunities, obstacles, and potential solutions for more integrated entrepreneurship support and education approaches in athlete dual careers, there remains a need for significant further exploration and research around this topic. Programmes need to be tailored to different types of athletes, and there remains a lack of sufficient data about the entrepreneurial skills and behaviours of athletes of different backgrounds.

Identifying the transversal competencies directly related to entrepreneurship that athletes possess and identifying skill gaps is an important starting point. An increasing number of studies have investigated this topic, including as it relates to general

entrepreneurship (Steinbrink et al., 2020) and social entrepreneurship (Capella-Peris et al., 2020; Moustakas & Kalina, 2021), but there is a need for more work in this direction. The skills developed in a sporting career can be highly valuable in the entrepreneurship context (Ratten, 2015; Reyes-Hernández et al., 2021). Nonetheless, there are risks related to over-generalising specific skills. Due to the idiosyncrasy of sport and physical and sporting activities, athletes may have developed certain skills to a greater or lesser extent. Similarly, different sports lead to the development of different social networks (see Humphreys, 2011), which can influence the entrepreneurial potential of athletes. Understanding these differences is crucial to develop effectively tailored entrepreneurship education and support offers.

Likewise, it is essential to further research and understand how athletes approach their dual career planning and how entrepreneurship support can best support these different styles. Generally speaking, there are three career models in elite sports: the linear model where athletes dedicate themselves entirely to their sporting careers; the convergent model, in which the athlete focuses mainly on their sports career, but also performs an extra activity as long as it does not interfere with the sports career; and the parallel model, in which the athlete combines a sports career with another, maintaining equal levels of interest and engagement (Pallarés et al., 2011). According to these models, so-called ‘strategic’ athletes (convergent or parallel careers) obtain better jobs and see improved well-being later in their lives (Vilanova & Puig, 2013). However, those who practice the linear model, because they invested the majority of their time and resources in their sports careers and neglected planning for their post-athletic life, have difficulties finding a sustainable, post-sporting career occupation (Lorenzo Fernández & Bueno Moreno, 2012; Pallarés et al., 2011). Understanding these different types’ characteristics and behaviours and how they perceive entrepreneurship can be a rich new avenue of inquiry. For instance, working to identify athletes who have linear careers and could have more difficulties in retirement is a valuable future research objective, and the possibilities for entrepreneurship for this group could be explored further.

6 Conclusion

Using extensive findings generated from the SENTA project, this paper has argued for the relevance of entrepreneurship within the context of athlete dual careers. In particular, we have highlighted how athletes may be uniquely well-positioned to thrive as entrepreneurs and how entrepreneurship can actively contribute to economic growth. Correspondingly, we have also proposed numerous solutions to better recognise and integrate entrepreneurship within dual career programmes, ranging from educational offers to post-career support.

For the moment, though, the glaring absence of entrepreneurship within programmes and policies is a critical gap in the current dual career landscape. Though entrepreneurship-related activities represent a significant proportion of overall occupational activity, athletes who aspire or would be well-suited to this

pathway are left mainly to their own devices. Effectively, this means that the dual career programmes neglect the potential or likely pathway of upwards of 15% of their athletes (Bosma et al., 2020), or even more in some countries.

Yet this gap also presents significant opportunities. Dual career policymakers must actively recognise entrepreneurship, but they are not starting from scratch. Individual actors have developed numerous educational and support activities around athlete or sport entrepreneurship (e.g. Ansari et al., 2020; Furim Institut, 2019; Kenny, 2015; TwIn, 2019), and these can be further combined or adapted to various national contexts. For researchers, there are also plentiful opportunities to explore how entrepreneurship programmes can best be tailored to athlete skills and approaches. Ultimately, greater efforts in this direction can help boost athlete entrepreneurship, ensure more successful post-athletic careers, and support overall economic development.

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