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Student-athletes' opinions about the individual plan and program of studies at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice

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Indywidualny plan i program studiów w Akademii Wychowania Fizycznego w Katowicach w opinii studentów-sportowców

Streszczenie

Indywidualny Plan i Program Studiów (IPPS) to forma pomocy, ułatwiająca studentom-sportowcom pogodzenie kariery sportowej i studiowania. IPPS polega przede wszystkim na ustalaniu

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indywidualnych terminów obecności na zajęciach, oferując możliwość indywidualnych konsultacji. Celem pracy była analiza opinii studentów-sportowców na temat IPPS realizowanego w AWF Katowice. Zastosowane metody badawcze to sondaż diagnostyczny techniką ankietową oraz analiza statystyczna wyników badań. Wykorzystano autorski kwestionariusz ankiety, który składał się z 23 pytań. Ankiety wypełniło 108 studentów-sportowców, objętych systemem IPPS.

Przeprowadzone badania sugerują, że najważniejszym powodem podjęcia studiów zadeklarowanym przez studentów-sportowców była chęć zdobycia wykształcenia. Zdobywanie pracy po zakończeniu kariery sportowej było ważniejszym powodem podjęcia studiów przez kobiety niż przez mężczyzn. System IPPS według opinii studentów pomaga pogodzić studia z karierą sportową i ma on również wpływ na decyzje o podjęciu studiów. Najwyżej oceniane przez studentów-sportowców elementy IPPS to możliwość indywidualnych ustaleń, dotyczących obecności na zajęciach, planów zajęć oraz terminów egzaminów, a także możliwość wydłużenia czasu trwania studiów. W opinii studentów-sportowców należałoby poprawić opiekę naukową, indywidualne doradztwo dotyczące łączenia kariery sportowej i studiów oraz dostępność prowadzących zajęcia i ich postawę w stosunku do studentów-sportowców.

Słowa kluczowe: plan i program studiów, student-sportowiec, kariera dwutorowa.

Abstract

The Individual Plan and Program of Studies (IPPS) is a form of support which helps student-athletes to combine studies with their sports career.

The IPPS provides the students with the means to individually arrange the date of class attendance by offering them the possibility of individual consultations. The aim of this study was to analyse the opinions of student-athletes about the IPPS at the APE in Katowice. The applied research methods included a diagnostic survey with the use of the questionnaire technique and the statistical analysis of the results. The author's own questionnaire consisting of 23 closed questions was used. The questionnaire was completed by 108 student-athletes participating in the IPPS.

Summary and Conclusions. The results suggest that the most important reason for studying at the university for student athletes, was their desire to obtain education. The student-athletes consider the IPPS helpful and the program had an influence on their decision to study at the university. The elements of the IPPS considered the most helpful by the student-athletes were: individual arrangements regarding class attendance, flexible class and exam timetables, as well as the possibility of extending their study period. In the opinion of the student-athletes, the elements of the program that need to be improved upon were: scientific advice and assistance in reconciling studying and sports career, as well as the availability of academic teachers and their attitude towards student-athletes.

Keywords: plan and program of studies, student-athlete, dual-career.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the demands placed on elite athletes ask for an immense amount of dedication in the pursuit of excellence. Therefore, most athletes spend their time developing their sports careers, leaving little time to develop other aspects of their lives outside of sport. At the same time, elite athletes are expected to pursue higher education in addition to their sports careers,

in order to achieve holistic development and increase their chances to fulfil a potential role in society and labour market. One of the main problems often highlighted in the literature is that the demands of professional sport far outstrip other aspects of student-athletes' lives, which may ultimately lead to a failure in both education and sport. An immense amount of work and time required for studying and sports training impacts the individual's lifestyle regarding time management as well as the effort and commitment needed to fulfil their roles as a student and an athlete (and also other roles, such as being a parent, a spouse etc.)[1]. Therefore, more and more often the purpose of scientific research in sport concerns the aspects and problems of "dual-career". This term describes a successful combination of a professional sports career and education or work [5]. Some of the scientific studies address the barriers encountered by athletes in various countries, other present statistical distribution taking into account various nationalities, levels of competitive sport and age.

Following different career paths simultaneously (e.g. education and sport) requires motivation and skill. Plenty of research regarding athletes' motivation to study simultaneously exists [7], [9], but there is still a lack of information about student-athletes' perception of their own challenges and needs [1], [11]. Parents, peers, academics, coaches, and managers are of great importance in the holistic support of student-athletes, but support in the macro dimension is also important, e.g. sports clubs, sports federations and universities [6]. Colleges and universities often offer certain conveniences (e.g. individual study programs, additional scholarships), enabling student-athletes to effectively fulfil their duties regarding learning. The phenomenon of a dual career is also the subject of research and numerous discussions in the European Union. In the year 2012, a document concerning the recommended actions of support for athletes in their undertaking education or employment was issued. It was pointed out that athletes often face the challenge of combining duties related to education or paid work with those related to professional sport, such as training, practice, camps and above all, partaking in competitions around the world. Additionally, in order to be successful at the highest level of competition, athletes have to sacrifice a lot of their time. Reconciling it with other activities (e.g. at the university), is often very difficult. In addition to the high level of motivation, responsibility, mental resilience and commitment required from successful athletes, appropriate arrangements or legal frameworks should be also developed to help them succeed. Such arrangements should facilitate life arrangements and encourage athletes to undertake a dual career, which should be beneficial for both sport and education.

A situation in which talented athletes are forced to choose between their sports career and education or work, should be avoided. In addition, starting a "new" career after finishing a career in professional sport should be encour-

aged. Education is the most helpful tool during athletes' active engagement in sport, because it can ease their transition into a new role with new responsibilities. However, it was noted that in many countries there is lack of appropriate agreements between sports institutions, the education system and labour market. A balanced government policy could be helpful in such arrangements. Systematic counselling may prove necessary for the development and improvement of the conditions conducive to undertaking a dual career, as well as implementation of appropriate programs which will enable the creation of solutions tailored to the needs of elite athletes in the European Union, both as a student-athlete and student-employee [3].

In order to raise awareness at a national level as well as to create a favourable environment for European students and contribute to the exchange of good practices in the field of a dual career, a European expert group has been set up. Their task is to develop European guidelines regarding the dual career of athletes. Furthermore, research on appropriate indicators for monitoring and evaluating the international dimension of dual career programs also aims to protect the development of young athletes [4].

On the other hand, in the year 2016, the EU document defined a dual career as a policy area that requires a well-organized system of cooperation, support of specialized personnel and systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of its programs. According to this document, only a few EU Member States have well-organized and extensive dual career systems based on formal agreements. Most countries' activities only encompass fragmentary aspects of it. Therefore, established platforms such as EU Sports Forums, meetings of sports directors and ministers of sport and education etc., can be valuable in enhancing cooperation between stakeholders at national or European level [2]. Many scientific studies confirm the need to develop a legal framework which favours young people achieving success in sport and education. Problems regarding a dual career include: finances, cooperation between sports and educational units, infrastructure, effort related to reconciling the above-mentioned and lack of time. Attention was also paid to the scepticism of employers regarding the skills of former athletes in the labour market [10].

The dual career is also more and more often handled by parliaments, ministries and institutes of individual countries. In the year 2015, the DELAB team of the University of Warsaw commissioned by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, prepared the report "Dual career of athletes in Poland: diagnosis of the situation" [13]. The report examined 23 universities and analysed their regulations, statutes and strategies. The main objective of the study was to determine the difficulties related to undertaking a sports career while being a student or an employee, as well as to gather and present the statistical data regarding the percentage of athletes who have minor problems with combining their sports

career with studying or working. The results of these studies clearly show that the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice is one of the most supportive universities for student-athletes in Poland. This state of affairs is a result of a thorough reforms and the introduction of a pro-sport policy, which ensures flexibility on the part of the academic teachers. Moreover, the report stated that the dual career solutions at the University of Physical Education in Katowice are considered to be a model of good practice [13].

In Poland, many universities (especially physical education academies) are taking steps to facilitate the study process for student-athletes. The most common form of such assistance is the Individual Course of Studies, consisting mainly in lowering the requirements for attendance, which was guaranteed in the Higher Education Act of 27 July 2005. Since the year 2005, the Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice has been carrying out the Individual Plan and Program of Studies (IPPS). According to the study regulations, the IPPS program provides support to a student who "is a member of the Polish National Team or its reserve, or the Universiade team; is an individual sports athlete of Olympic disciplines, and has the First Sports, Champion Sports rank or International Champion title; is a player in a sports team which competes in central championships organised by Polish Sport Associations" [12]. The system includes, among others, individual arrangements regarding the class attendance and exam timetables, and the possibility of extending the study period.

Purpose

The aim of this research was to analyse student-athletes' opinions about the IPPS at the University of Physical Education in Katowice. The following research question were formulated:

1. Does IPPS facilitate education for student-athletes?
2. Which element of the IPPS system is the most important for student -athletes?
3. What changes should be made to the IPPS system?

Material and methods

The sample comprised student-athletes who took part in the IPPS program at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice. The survey was conducted in the academic year 2018/2019. The analyses included the data from questionnaires completed by 108 people (50 women and 58 men), aged 19 to 41 (average age 22.8 years), who declared being a member of a sports club and having

a sports rank. Most of the respondents (78%) were students of physical education and management (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of male and female respondents according to field of study

Field of study	Total		Females		Males	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Physical education	63	58.33	31	62.00	32	55.17
Sport	9	8.33	2	4.00	7	12.07
Management	21	19.44	7	14.00	14	24.14
Physiotherapy	5	4.63	3	6.00	2	3.45
Tourism and recreation	4	3.70	2	4.00	2	3.45
Physical activity and nutrition in public health	5	4.63	5	10.00	0	0.00
Personal Trainer with sport nutrition	1	0.93	0	0.00	1	1.72
Total	108	100%	50	100%	58	100%

Source: own research.

Most of the respondents student-athletes represented summer and individual sports disciplines. More than a half of the surveyed female athletes represented individual sports disciplines, and two-thirds participated in summer sports disciplines. Furthermore, most of the men athletes (over 70%) represented individual sports disciplines (table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of male and female respondents according to sport type

Sport type	Total		Females		Males	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Summer sport	64	59.25	33	66.00	31	53.45
Winter sport	44	40.74	17	34.00	27	46.55
Total	108	100%	50	100%	58	100%
Team sport	41	37.96	24	48.00	17	29.31
Individual sport	67	62.03	26	52.00	41	70.69
Total	108	100%	50	100%	58	100%

Source: own research.

In order to assess the IPPS system, the method of the diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique was applied. The original questionnaire consisting of 23 close-ended questions and one open-ended question was used. The ques-

tionnaire was previously assessed by competent judges and the respondents completed the survey anonymously via the Internet.

Statistical analyses were conducted in the Excel spreadsheet and in the Statistica 13.1 package. The components of the structure (the number of individual responses and percentages) as well as the means and standard deviations for quantitative data were calculated. To test the hypotheses (significant differences between males and females) an independent sample t-test was used. The assumed significance level was set at $\alpha < 0.05$.

Results

The majority of respondents (88.89%) had no difficulties in obtaining a positive decision regarding the IPPS. However, 11.11% of the respondents declared experiencing problems with receiving a positive decision (acceptance into the IPPS).

The results of the questionnaires are presented in the Tables 3–7. All items were assessed on a 5-point scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), don't know (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5). The higher the score, the more a given respondent identifies with a given questionnaire item. Significantly different mean values (with the assumed level at 0.05), were tagged with the "*" symbol. In the tables, mean values are represented by the letter "M", the standard deviations by the letters "SD", and the letter "p" represents the test probability of obtaining significant differences.

The most important reason for studying (Table 3) according to the entire sample of student-athletes was a desire to attain an education ($M = 4.52$, answers between "agree" and "strongly agree"), and the least important reason was studying because of coach's and sports club's encouragement ($M = 2.35$). Working after the end of a sports career was a more important reason for females ($M = 4.44$) than for males ($M = 4.07$). It was the only statistically significant difference between males and females, regarding the declared reasons for pursuing higher education.

The results regarding the impact of the IPPS on student-athletes' decision to attend university and on their ability to reconcile studying with their sports career are presented in Table 4. The potential benefits from the IPPS had a positive influence on the student-athletes' decision to take up studies ($M = 4.37$, between "agree" and "strongly agree"). There were no significant differences between the declarations of males and females. The IPPS is helpful in reconciling studying and sports careers – the mean value (4.62) indicates answers between "agree" and "strongly agree", but is closer to "strongly agree" than in the item

regarding the decision to take up studies. The results indicated no significant differences between the declarations of males and females.

Table 3. Reasons for attending university, means, standard deviations and significant differences between the declarations of males and females

Reasons for attending university	Total, N = 108		Females, n = 50		Males, n = 58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Interests	4.32	0.88	4.42	0.81	4.24	0.94	0.30
Family/friends encouragement	2.81	1.18	2.86	1.11	2.78	1.24	0.71
Coach/sports club encouragement	2.35	1.15	2.30	1.09	2.40	1.21	0.67
Wanting to obtain an education	4.52	0.68	4.60	0.53	4.45	0.78	0.25
Working after the end of a sports career	4.24	0.96	4.44*	0.67	4.07*	1.12	0.04*

* p < 0,05

Source: own research.

Table 4. Percentage of male and female respondents according to a field of study

Field of study	Total		Females		Males	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Physical education	63	58.33	31	62.00	32	55.17
Sport	9	8.33	2	4.00	7	12.07
Management	21	19.44	7	14.00	14	24.14
Physiotherapy	5	4.63	3	6.00	2	3.45
Tourism and recreation	4	3.70	2	4.00	2	3.45
Physical activity and nutrition in public health	5	4.63	5	10.00	0	0,00
Personal Trainer with sport nutrition	1	0.93	0	0.00	1	1.72
Total	108	100%	50	100%	58	100%

Source: own research.

The responses regarding the support from the APE Katowice employees as perceived by athletes studying in the IPPS, are presented in Table 5. The support from academic teachers (sympathy and understanding from lecturers) was assessed by the student-athletes as low – the mean value (3.61) indicates answers above “don’t know” and below “agree”. There were no statistically significant differences between the declarations of males and females. The help from uni-

versity administration was more favourably assessed by male students ($M = 4.33$, answers above "agree") than by female students ($M = 3.96$, answers below "agree") and it was a statistically significant difference.

Table 5. Support from university employees

Support	Total, N = 108		Females, n = 50		Males, n = 58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Sympathy and understanding from lecturers							
Academic teachers	3.61	0.75	3.68	0.74	3.55	0.75	0.38
Help from university administration							
Administration employees	4.16	0.79	3.96*	0.86	4.33*	0.69	0.01*

* $p < 0,05$

Source: own research.

The assessment of the support from the environment and the IPPS' elements are presented in Table 6. According to the student-athletes, a flexible timetable ($M = 4.59$) and individual arrangements regarding class attendance ($M = 4.51$) are the most helpful ones in reconciling studying and sports career. The lowest scores were given to scientific advice and assistance in reconciling studying and sports career ($M = 3.5$, answers between "don't know" and "agree"). There were no statistically significant differences between males and females in the assessment of the IPPS elements. However, in the analysis of support from the environment (Table 6), statistically significant differences were found between the declarations of males and females. The female student-athletes negatively assessed the support from sports club and sponsors ($M = 2.94$, answers between "disagree" and "don't know"), while the male student athletes answered slightly above "don't know" ($M = 3.36$). On the other hand, support from family and friends was rated higher by females ($M = 4.00$, answers meaning "agree") than males ($M = 3.88$, answers below "agree"). The support from coaches and team mates was rated below "agree" by both males and females – no statistically significant differences were found here.

The analysis of the student-athletes' difficulties during their course of studies and potential reasons for dropping out showed statistically significant differences between the declarations of males and females (Table 7). The difficulties related to personal reasons such as lack of motivation and family-related issues were rated higher by males ($M = 2.81$, answers closer to "don't know") than females ($M = 2.14$, answers closer to "disagree"). Regarding the remaining difficulties and potential reasons for dropping out of university, no significant differences were found between the declarations of males and females. According to the student-athletes, the greatest difficulties are related to lack of time for stud-

ying ($M = 3.92$, answers close to “agree”) and the most likely reason for dropping out is lack of support from the university ($M = 3.70$, answers close to “agree”).

Table 6. Support and facilitation, means, standard deviations and significant differences between the declarations of males and females

Support and facilitation	Total, N = 108		Females, n = 50		Males, n = 58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Helpfulness assessment of IPPS elements							
Flexible timetable	4.59	0.67	4.56	0.76	4.62	0.59	0.64
Individual arrangements regarding class attendance	4.51	0.62	4.52	0.68	4.50	0.57	0.87
Flexible exam timetable	4.21	0.93	4.28	0.99	4.16	0.87	0.49
E-mail contact with academic teachers	3.95	0.96	3.96	0.99	3.95	0.94	0.95
Possibility to extend a study period	4.30	0.79	4.36	0.80	4.24	0.78	0.44
Scholarships	3.70	1.16	3.74	1.16	3.67	1.18	0.76
Scientific advice and assistance	3.50	0.96	3.60	0.86	3.41	1.04	0.32
Support from environment							
Coaches and team mates	3.71	0.55	3.74	0.56	3.69	0.54	0.64
Club and sponsors	3.17	0.89	2.94*	0.91	3.36*	0.83	0.01*
Family and friends	3.94	0.31	4.00*	0.00	3.88*	0.42	0.04*

* $p < 0,05$

Source: own research.

Table 7. Difficulties and reasons for leaving university, means, standard deviations and significant differences between the declarations of males and females

Difficulties and reasons for leaving university	Total, N = 108		Females, n = 50		Males, n = 58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Challenges and difficulties							
Educational challenges (requirements are too high)	2.92	1.15	2.78	1.11	3.03	1.18	0.25
Not having enough time to study	3.92	0.97	3.84	1.06	3.98	0.89	0.45
Sport challenges (coach/club)	2.46	1.07	2.40	0.93	2.52	1.19	0.57

Table 7. Difficulties and reasons... (cont.)

Difficulties and reasons for leaving university	Total, N = 108		Females, n = 50		Males, n = 58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Challenges and difficulties							
Personal issues (lack of motivation, family problems)	2.50	1.07	2.14*	0.86	2.81*	1.15	0.00*
Distance to university/ training centres	3.47	1.34	3.48	1.30	3.47	1.38	0.96
Financial difficulties	3.42	1.25	3.30	1.28	3.52	1.22	0.37
Potential reasons for leaving university							
Lack of time	3.52	1.18	3.34	1.21	3.67	1.15	0.15
Family-related reasons	3.48	1.09	3.48	1.03	3.48	1.14	0.99
Unsatisfactory results in education	2.49	0.98	2.52	0.95	2.47	1.01	0.78
Unsatisfactory results in sport	2.82	1.17	2.70	1.15	2.93	1.20	0.31
Lack of motivation	3.06	1.02	2.88	0.94	3.21	1.07	0.10
Lack of support from university	3.70	0.97	3.56	0.99	3.83	0.94	0.15
Financial difficulties	3.61	1.06	3.52	1.03	3.69	1.08	0.41

* p < 0,05

Source: own research.

Discussion and conclusions

So far, almost all research which addressed support systems for student-athletes has referred to global solutions e.g. national ones or those from the Union [3], [4], [13]. Actions related to the implementation of appropriate legal acts at a state level or at a group of states' level regarding their support for student-athletes are crucial. However, it is also necessary to ensure appropriate implementation of programs at the university level. International studies have demonstrated that properly designed support systems for student-athletes at the university level affect not only their comfort in terms of combining two ca-

reers (in sport and education) but also their learning achievements and overall satisfaction [11]. At the same time, lack of such support leads to misunderstandings and inconsistencies in their sports careers and education [8]. A good example of a support system in the Polish academic community is the Individual Plan and Program of Studies at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice. The IPPS program is designed to make it easier for active athletes to study and to successfully complete their university education. The main objective of this research was to identify to what extent the support system for student-athletes is effective as well as to indicate areas which could be improved by the university. First, the university should focus on the issue of individual scientific advice and assistance. The study regulations provide such a form of assistance (§ 11 of the Study Regulations), but several respondents declared (while answering the open-ended question) that they had not even encountered this kind of support. This research has also revealed that many academic teachers are not sympathetic towards student-athletes, for example, lecturers require more class attendance than necessary. The study regulations could enforce less strict class attendance requirements from lecturers without reducing student's obligations. Another issue is the availability of lecturers. The solution could be up-to-date teacher schedules accessible on the university website. This would allow for trouble-free contact at a convenient time for a given student as the respondents often declared that e-mail contact with their academic teachers was difficult or impossible. The research results clearly indicated that the most important aspects of reconciling education with sports career are available time and university support. Therefore, the above-mentioned conveniences would significantly affect the perception of the IPPS system, and consequently, increase the percentage of student-athletes who complete their studies as well as the percentage of athletes who decide to enrol at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice. Many of the respondents declared hesitation as whether to continue their studies at the APE in Katowice. By taking the necessary steps to improve the IPPS system, the university could acquire many valuable student-athletes, which would certainly translate into better results in university rankings. The survey questionnaire used in this pilot study will be further developed and used in subsequent studies.

The following conclusions were drawn from the conducted research:

1. The IPPS helps student-athletes to a great extent in reconciling their sports career with education.
2. The elements of the IPPS which are considered to be the most helpful in combining professional sports training with studying are primarily related to individual arrangements regarding class attendance, flexible class and exam timetables as well as the possibility of extending the study period.

3. The elements of the IPPS that need to be improved upon are mainly scientific advice and assistance in reconciling studying and sports career as well as the availability of academic teachers and their attitude towards student-athletes.

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