



THE SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF ATHLETES DURING AND AFTER ELITE COMPETITION

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ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

I have been very fortunate, both during and after my sporting career. I am an Olympic champion, a world champion and still a world record holder. And I, like many other athletes, could not have attained these accomplishments and this success on my own.

My entourage, including coaches and trainers, family and friends contributed greatly to these achievements. I was fortunate, my hard work paid off. Looking back though, I know that I did not have all of the necessary tools at my disposal to successfully manage training, competition and the challenges of day-to-day life.

Athletes tend to focus on the moment – they focus on their next game or race, rather than what is to come following their sporting career. We must show athletes that they can pursue sporting excellence, while also focusing on pursuing an education, developing skills and interests outside of sport, and thinking about the eventual transition from competitive sports to a new career – all skills which will assist them both during and after their sporting career.

In fact, many believe that the pursuit of a “dual career” will actually improve an athlete’s performance on the field of play. What can the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Olympic Movement give back to the athletes whose brilliant athletic feats will be remembered for a life time? What can the IOC and the Olympic Movement do to ensure that athletes get the support they need and that they have the necessary tools at their disposal?

In 2005, the IOC and Adecco joined forces to create the IOC Athlete Career Programme (IOC ACP) to provide athletes with the support they require during and after their sports career. The Programme, which was renewed in 2008 focuses on three pillars: Education, Life Skills and Employment.

1. EDUCATION

It is possible to combine studies and a sporting career. Pursuing an education should not be seen as a distraction to an athlete’s training and competition.

Distance education and/or e-learning may be suitable for those athletes whose training and competition schedules do not allow them to attend school during regular hours. For some athletes, it may be the cost of pursuing an education which deters them. I would suggest that the sports movement should consider providing financial grants to athletes to help them pay for these costs.

Consideration should also be given to the creation of a special educational structure for athletes, which will allow them to improve upon their current skill and also obtain new skills during and after their sporting career.

2. LIFE SKILLS

Due to the amount of time that an athlete spends training and competing, they often do not have a lot of time to develop interests outside of sport and to develop “life skills”. These life skills are skills which are used in some form or another by everybody, everyday. They include skills such as financial planning, goal setting as well as time management and are skills which help athletes in and out of the sporting area.

3. EMPLOYMENT

Just as it is important to train for sport, it is also important to prepare for the day you retire from it. In order to be prepared for retirement, athletes should be encouraged to be proactive and absorb as much education and experience as possible while still competing.

The IOC ACP helps athletes define their professional goals and assesses what education and training they may need to enter that field. The programme also offers support and advice for an athlete’s professional career including information on drafting a résumé, job hunting and interview preparation. It is my strong belief that the IOC ACP would benefit from increased cooperation between Adecco and National Olympic Committees (NOCs); Adecco and sponsors; as well as job placement companies in general.

Other issues should also be considered:

AGENTS

In recent years, the classic relationship between coach and athlete has changed due to the presence of agents. More and more athletes have engaged the services of agents, who help them with a variety of administrative tasks, such as negotiating jobs and endorsement deals, preparing an athlete’s competition schedule and providing advice on financial and legal issues.

Unfortunately, we are all aware of cases whereby an agent puts their own interests ahead of those of the athlete. While for every bad agent there are certainly hundreds of good ones, I would strongly recommend that each sport puts in place a licensing or regulatory system for agents.



HOW TO GET THIS INFORMATION INTO THE HANDS OF ATHLETES?

There is certainly no lack of information out there – it is more a question of how to get this information into the hands of those who need it most: the athletes and their entourage.

IOC WEBSITE

The new IOC website will include a page dedicated to the IOC ACP. The site will include information about the programme as well as fact sheets on topics such as health and nutrition, financial planning, time management, media training and goal setting, creative and critical thinking. All of these fact sheets will be available for download and in a printable format. The site will also include video testimonials from athletes who have benefitted from the programme and links to other useful information.

The website will also include a list of “best practices” which will be of particular interest to those parties who have either set up programmes or wish to do so.

YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES

We must reach out to athletes from a young age, and the first ever Youth Olympic Games in Singapore next year will give the IOC and the Olympic Movement an opportunity to speak directly with these young and impressionable athletes.

The objective of the Culture and Education Programme (CEP), an innovative element of the Youth Olympic Games, is to share the Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect and to discuss important themes linked to the practice of sport.

Five educational themes will guide these discussions, among them are the themes of skill development and well-being and healthy lifestyle.

NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEES (NOCs), INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS (IFS) AND NATIONAL FEDERATIONS (NFS)

While it is an athlete’s responsibility to prepare for their life after sport, all stakeholders in sport – including National Sporting Organisations, NOCs, NFs and IFs – should be encouraged to help athletes prepare for the transition.

These stakeholders should also be encouraged to exchange ideas and best practices among one another and should, where possible, also put formal programmes in place.

THE PERFECT ROLE MODEL – A FELLOW ATHLETE

We learn from our successes and from our setbacks. We also learn from the success and setbacks of others. I have personally seen the positive influence when athletes share such moments among themselves. What better way to encourage younger athletes to pursue the concept of a “dual career” than to engage athlete role models, who have been successful on and off the field of play. The Ukrainian Olympic Committee involves athlete role models and I urge NOCs, IFs, NFs, and Athletes’ Commissions to do the same.

CONCLUSION

The responsibility of the Olympic stakeholders is to create the necessary conditions for athletes to shine on the field of play. Similarly and equally important, it is our duty to assist them to be balanced individuals. We need to ensure that they have what they need to be true Olympians!

Whatever we do, it is up to each individual to make a difference – each athlete has to make his or her own choices! Sport is a team effort and a beautiful career is no different!