

Athletes Support Services: A Systematic Review Of The Literature

Raduan Alexandrino, Rosiane; Da Cunha Bastos, Flávia

University of São Paulo, Brazil

E-mail: rosiane.alexandrino@usp.br

Aim of the research

The aim of this study was to make a systematic review of the publications about services and resources offered to support elite athletes.

Theoretical background

The development process of the sport and specifically of the athlete's career is still a very recent area of study and involves different factors and people of interest. Several authors have conducted researches in recent decades to explain the factors that lead to sports success (Houlihan & Green, 2008; De Bosscher, Shibil, Westerbeek, & Van Bottenburg, 2015). The great interest in giving the athletes complete dedication to sports so that they can achieve their sporting success and understand why some nations are more competitive than others has raised a set of 'ingredients' that would be the way to achieve this success. These indispensable items range from broader actions to specific interventions in the athlete's life. In order to achieve the highest level of sport, the athletes have a long career, and for this to be achieved with excellence, it is essential to provide athletes with the necessary conditions and support. The necessary support is described in the literature as financial support, good training facilities and equipment, specialized training, medical, nutritional and physiotherapy services and physical preparation, as well as good management of their career, that is, having a strategic plan of the goals and objectives to be achieved by the athlete, taking into account their progress, so that time and resources are not wasted.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A bibliographic search of publications in pre-established databases (SCOPUS, Web of Science and SPORT-Discuss) was carried out using the combination of the terms 'career development', 'development system', 'talent identification' and 'support program' with the word 'athlete'. A large number of articles were found, but after the exclusion of those who were not exclusively concerned with athletes and their sports career (retirement, disabled athletes, coaches and athlete's second job), those who were not published in scientific journals and duplicates, a total of 108 articles were left. After analyzing these remaining articles, a new selection was made, where those articles that dealt with career, but not specifically the support offered to the athlete were excluded (psychological, physiological, biomechanical, genetic and anthropometric approach). In the end, we selected 26 articles that met the inclusion criteria. The analysis of the data was made through content analysis following the steps of pre-analysis, analytical description and interpretation (Bardin, 2011). The categories established a priori were: research objective, sample and main results.

Results, discussion and conclusion

When we analyzed the articles, we noticed that there is a lack of studies that focus on the support services offered to the athletes. In almost all studies the sample was composed of young athletes who, along with the sport, attended some type of education (high school or higher education). Although described in the literature as an essential factor to achieve sporting success, athlete support, especially in the development phase, still does not receive the necessary attention. The studies found highlight the importance of enjoying support in all areas of the athlete's life, emphasizing a holistic development. It was also evident the concern with the management and availability of resources for athletes so they can focus exclusively on training and do not have to worry about other distraction, which proved to be fundamental to reach their best performance, contributing to the development of themselves and the sport (Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2014). However, in no study analyzed it was evident who is responsible for the management and supply of material and non-material resources for these athletes. It was concluded that, although significant, this theme still needs a lot of attention, mainly because there is a lack of clarity in some terms and nomenclature used in development of athletes, causing lack of general consensus and problems in their approach. In addition, as De Bosscher et al. (2015) points out, a good support system in the athlete's development phase, that gives athletes money and time to train and compete as if they were full-time professional athletes, can provide a long-term basis for competitive advantage by delivering more talented athletes to the elite sport teams.

References

- Bardin, L. (2011). *Analysis of content*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- De Bosscher, V., Shibil, S., Westerbeek, H., & Van Bottenburg, M. (2015). *Successful elite sport policies: An international comparison of the Sportpolicy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS 2.0) in 15 nations*. Meyer & Meyer.
- Gulbin, J. P., Croser, M. J., Morley, E. J., & Weissensteiner, J. R. (2013). An integrated framework for the optimisation of sport and athlete development: A practitioner approach. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *31*, 1319–1331.
- Houlihan, B. & Green, M. (2008). *Comparative Elite Sports Development: Systems, structures and public policy*. London: Elsevier.
- Mills, A., Butt, J., Maynard, I., & Harwood, C. (2014). Examining the development environments of elite English football academies: The players' perspective. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *9*, 1457–1472.