

The Financial And Social Security Of Elite Sport In Switzerland

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Main objective

A recent study outlines the difficult financial situation for Swiss professional athletes, who compete in an international environment (Kempf, Weber, Renaud & Stopper, 2014). The situation implicates two problems in the promotion of elite sport in Switzerland: On one hand, entering the elite sport system in Switzerland is financially and professionally not attractive for high-qualified specialists and on the other hand, there is a lack of post career support. This is shown in a cross country analysis of post career support of 14 countries, where Switzerland lags behind (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek & van Bottenburg, 2015). As part of the response to the postulate described below, this abstract outlines the difficult situation for elite sport athletes in Switzerland based on their employment status and their income level, which diverges significantly from the one of the conventional labour force in Switzerland.

Purpose and background

In May 2014 the Science, Education and Culture Committee of the Swiss National Council (one of the two chambers of the Swiss Federal Assembly, representing the people of each canton by proportion) requested from the Swiss government, the Federal Council, a report on how the financial and social security of elite sport careers can be improved effectively. The Federal Council as well as the National Council approved this so-called postulate in September 2014. The purpose of the report was to give an overview of the situation for elite sport athletes and to make aware of the problem of funding elite sport in Switzerland. The report was approved and published by the federal council in November 2016.

Design and implementation

The paper is based on a survey of the Federal Office of Sports (Kempf et al., 2014), where 959 (n = 959) elite sport athletes were interviewed on different aspects of their career. It is extended through descriptive statistics comparing the employment situation of elite sport athletes in Switzerland with the regular labour force by working hours (part-time or full-time) and the number of jobs athletes have (multiple job holding). In our definition, a full-time elite sport athlete only focusses on sport and doesn't work or study on the side in contrast to parttime elite sport athletes. The comparison was made with the Swiss labour force in total and that in a similar age-range with the athletes during the time of the survey, depending on the available data of the Federal Statistical Office. The paper analyses the situation for elite sport athletes in Switzerland, outlines the problems they face and suggests how to overcome them. The report reflects literature regarding dual career and elite sport career development. The main statements for my contribution are the late post-career concern of the athletes (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004), as well as the difficulty of developing a general formula for success in the post-athlete career due to differences in maturation of athletes (e.g. biological growth, behaviour) respecting different sports (Bergeron et al., 2015).

Results and Future of the Project The results show that while 72% of Swiss employees between age 15 and 39 work full-time, only 29% of elite sport athletes don't pursue another profession. The difference regarding multiple job holding is even more extreme. While 37% of elite sport athletes hold multiple jobs, which means they hold at least one regular job next to being a professional athlete, only 6% of the Swiss labour force aged between 15 and 39 and 7% of the whole Swiss labour force hold multiple jobs. Both, working part-time as well as holding multiple jobs, lead to financial gaps in the pension fund for life after retirement, but also in the disability and unemployment insurances. The Swiss social security system is financed at least to fifty per cent by the employer. Because athletes are often self-employed, they have to finance their pension fund all by themselves. The low median income of elite sport athletes — is less than a third of the median of the general full-time labour force and only 40% of the median income of the labour force aged 20 to 29 — amplifies this problem. As a result we suggest making the athletes aware of their personal responsibility as well as implementing entrepreneurial thinking. In practice, an athlete should view his career as an enterprise and should take measures for the time after the elite sport career. The athletes should get easy access to coaching for these matters. The main stakeholders, who should initiate, support and finance these programs, are the National Olympic Committee and the Sporthilfe, a charity that supports Swiss elite sport athletes financially.

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