

The Roles, Tasks and Competencies of European Career Support Providers (CSP's) Within Professional Football

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Aim

The general objective of this study is to develop a broader understanding of how European career support providers may successfully support and guide professional football players with regard to a dual career, a balance between the life within and outside the football game and the transition into a post-football career. To this end, the specific objectives of this research are (a) to gain insight in the specific roles and tasks of a career support provider within European football and (b) to gain insight in the required competencies to fulfil those specific roles and tasks.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Athletic career literature emphasizes the possible advantages of exploring different life domains and having a dual career to prepare for the transition towards the post-athletic career (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). This development outside of the sport appears to reduce the chances of experiencing difficulties upon retirement, and is linked with health-related benefits, developmental benefits, social benefits and enhanced future employment prospects (Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013). In the context of those possible advantages, it is necessary to consider whether the environment of professional athletes (including professional career support), is adequately adjusted to support their development as a 'whole person' (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Although there is growing amount of knowledge and expertise on dual and post-athletic careers of professional players, the topic of career support providers in professional football remains under researched.

Research Design and Data Analysis

To develop a broader understanding of how European career support providers may successfully support and guide professional football players in pursuing a holistic development, the researchers used semi-structured interviews. After acquiring ethical approval, 15 participants, consisting of expert career support providers within the field of European football, were involved. Using deductive thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the first specific objective was achieved by categorising the specific roles and tasks of a career support provider into the different levels of the Holistic Athletic Career (HAC) model (i.e. athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational and financial) (Wylleman & Rosier, 2016). To achieve the second specific objective of the study, competencies were categorized into the underlying attributes of a person (i.e. skills, attitudes, knowledge and experiences) (Roe, 2002). Within both of the specific objectives themes within the deductive categories were inductively identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results and Discussion

Preliminary results revealed that career support providers have different roles and tasks depending on the level of the HAC model. Despite the fact that CSP's should not be involved in the development of players on the athletic level, it's of great importance that CSP's recognize that priority most of the times is placed on football performance. The main roles and tasks of CSP's can be found on the academic and vocational level in guiding players to

pursue a successful dual career and to prepare for a purposeful post-football career. When it comes to the financial, psychosocial and psychological level, the roles and tasks of CSP's are mainly focused on signposting the players to relevant others. In executing the tasks and roles within the different levels of the HAC model, CSP's require a broad area of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences. Knowledge relates mainly to sufficient cognition of the football environment, legal, financial and mental wellbeing aspects. With regard to the skills a CSP need, four themes were identified: psychological skills, communication skills, organisation skills and cooperation skills. Attitudes mainly reflect professionalism aspects. Finally, experiences are mainly situated in life experience factors. During the presentation more detailed research data will be presented.

Conclusion and Implications

Current research aimed at developing a broader understanding of the roles, tasks and competencies of CSP's in guiding football players within European professional football. To optimize the holistic development of professional football players, support services should be knowledgeable about the roles and competencies they are expected to fulfil and to possess. Therefore, this research can be a crucial element for career support providers in order to enhance professional football players' holistic development within as well as outside and beyond the game of football. Based on the findings of the current research, future studies could focus on the development and validation of a quantitative competency framework for CSP's in European professional football.

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