

A2B Study Visit Report

Helsinki

Mäkelänrinne Swimming Center, 9 June 2010 (13:00 – 18:00)

Sports Museum of Finland, 10 June 2010 (8:30-17:00)

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2.1. A European Perspective.....	3
2.2. Mäkelänrinne Elite Sport High School: How to Combine Sport and Studies.....	4
2.3. The Finnish Sport Academy System	5
2.4. Cooperation in Team Sports in Supporting Players' Study and Career Planning.....	6
2.5. Sport Organisations' Role in Supporting Dual Career	7
2.6. Role of the Coach in Supporting an Athlete's Dual Career	7
2.7. Video Broadcasting as Practical Tool in Distance Learning	8
2.8. Athlete Career Program in Finland.....	9
3.0. Conclusion.....	10

1. Introduction

The Finnish Olympic Committee is the responsible entity for the national coordination and development of dual career concerns. This is taking place in alliance with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sports and Culture.

Since 2001, it is providing athletes with study counselling services. In cooperation with Adecco Finland it has put an Athlete Career Program (ACP) in place in 2004.

From 2007 on, the Finnish Olympic Committee has been coordinating the Sport Academy Network which is considered a very good practice in the field of dual career.

This report shall focus on good practices established in the Finnish system than can be utilized to produce recommendations on an ideal framework for dual career in Europe. As the seminar was enriched by Hannu Takkula, Member of the European Parliament, it also illustrates possible future EU actions on dual career.

2.1. A European Perspective

Hannu Takkula - Member of the European Parliament (Culture Committee)

The European Parliament attaches great significance to sport primarily because of health issues.

Legal Framework of Sport

Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty gives a "soft competence" coordinating and supporting action in the field of sport as well as the opportunity to speak with "one voice" at international platforms. Next to the new budget from 2014 on, in October 2010 there will be a new communication by the European Commissioner Vassiliou of sport on an EU level.

Sport & EU

With regards to the future EU action on sport, difficulties arise in the high level of bureaucracy. While expectations are very high tools and funding are limited. Nevertheless, in the interest to build a good future, sport, education and culture will be invested in with education and training being one of the focus areas.

Challenges

The EU's biggest challenge in the field of sports lies in its diversity as there are variations in sport preference, public and private funding, teaching in schools and TV coverage.

Actions on Dual Career

As suggested in the available A2B documents, the EU could help by improving the legal frameworks, e.g. by developing standards and quality control mechanisms. Furthermore, it sees a great potential in supporting the formation of networks to share knowledge and experience whereas the establishment of good practices remains a more difficult task.

2.2. Mäkelänrinne Elite Sport High School: How to Combine Sport and Studies

Anne Mäki – Vice Principal
Joel Heinikoski – Basketball Athlete

National Elite Sport Schools have existed since 1986 in Finland, comprising 11 vocational and 13 high schools today. Coordinated by the NOC, their status and extra resources are given by the Finnish Ministry of Education. At current, they host about 2000 athletes aged 16 to 19 years.

Mäkelänrinne, located in Helsinki is considered one of Finland's top Elite Sport High Schools.

In this schooling system, athletes follow the same educational path as their non-sporting peers. They can choose from 800 study courses and attend group lessons with changing participants instead of classes. Athletes have to complete a minimum of 75 courses plus coaching and training theory in order to graduate. Specific is the non-graded schooling system. Admission is based on grades, sporting merit (evaluated by the national sport federation) and an entrance interview/ exam. Experience has shown that both, academic as well as sporting results have been positive suggesting an effective means to balance sports and education.

Good Practices:

- Open for everyone, all athletes have same opportunities to create their career
- Training and education facilities are located close to each other
- Effective athlete support
 - Student counsellor responsible for setting up individual study schedules
 - Flexibility of teachers: advice athletes how to proceed in case of absence
 - Availability of distance studies via internet
- Dual career friendly courses
 - Sports training and discussions about future professional life included in the official curriculum
- Possibility for individual planning
 - Flexible study time: 3 to 4+ years
 - Non-graded and flexible course system
- Networking
 - School is part of the Metropolitan Sport Academy
 - Support from the Ministry of Education
 - Coach salary paid by club/ sport organisation and education institution

Areas for Improvement:

- Curriculum
 - Large course offer: students need good counselling to set priorities
 - Study groups should be smaller (appr. 30 people in one group)
 - Possibly implement "lighter" study schedules using more years
- Self-responsibility of athletes
 - Lacking motivation
 - Coaches could encourage athletes to study more
- Staff
 - Low number of student counsellors: 3
- Continuation of academic education

- Dual career in higher education is not as well arranged as in high school

2.3. The Finnish Sport Academy System

Asko Härkönen	-	Development Director, NOC Finland
Tuuli Merikoski	-	Manager for Athletes' Study and Career Planning, NOC Finland
Simo Tarvonen	-	Vice Principal, Sport Academy of the Metropolitan Area
Juha Dahlström	-	Elite Sports Coordinator, Sport Academy of the Metropolitan Area
Markus Kalmari	-	Principal, Sport Academy of Turku Region

Athletes

The "Sport Academy System" in Finland has started about 10 years ago. Its central aim is to effectively support combined athlete training and education by integrating stakeholders involved in dual career under one umbrella. Most Olympic athletes, about two thirds in the Vancouver Winter Olympics 2010, come out of this system.

In concrete, it is a network of stakeholders within elite sport: Local sport clubs, national federations, municipal sectors, education institutions, providers of services related to sport and education and athletes who are also members of the board.

Since 2007, it has been nationally coordinated by the NOC Finland that gives status of "NOC Elite-Sport Academy" by special audition. It is provided resources to facilitate the network.

Example 1: Sport Academy of the Metropolitan Area

- ⇒ 18 educational establishments, 7 Universities or Polytechnics
- ⇒ 20 sports and national federations
- ⇒ 50 full time coaches, 10 supported by the Finnish Olympic Committee
- ⇒ 1570 athletes

The Sport Academy of the Metropolitan Area covers the cities of Espoo, Vantaa and Helsinki. Mäkelänrinne Elite Sports High School is founder and coordinator of the system. By putting the athlete into the centre, the academy resembles a tray giving athletes the possibility to pick up individual services.

Example 2: Sport Academy of Turku Region

- ⇒ Higher education institutions (38 athletes)
- ⇒ Upper secondary schools (271 athletes aged 16 to 19)
- ⇒ Secondary schools (375 athletes aged 13 to 16)
- ⇒ Primary schools (75 athletes aged 7 to 13)

The Sport Academy of Turku region is an agreement between local education institutions and the Sport Academy in the city of Turku. Its central aims are to improve the quality of daily training, support athletes in their studies and organize support services.

Good Practices of the Sport Academy System:

- Athlete support
 - Access to different sport services (health care, nutrition, etc.)
 - Education institutions allow flexible programs for elite athletes → possibility for e-learning depending on subjects
 - System ensures daily rhythm
 - Contact person available at every University
 - Coordinator of sport academy builds up dual career plan with athlete, organizes training facilities, helps in finding accommodation, organizes health care services
- Networking
 - Signed agreements between education institutions and national federations to support both goals → members are committed
 - Forum for cooperation between different sports, exchange of ideas and experience
 - Use of existing structures, resources and know-how
 - Regular meetings create synergy
 - Education institution shares salary costs of coordinator with sport academy
- One home and responsible for coordination: NOC Finland

Areas for Improvement:

- System does not solve some of biggest challenges in an athlete's life, mainly finances
- Tailored to individual athletes, more complex for team sport athletes
- Improvement needed in developing life-skills (e.g. self management)
- Coordinators have a large geographical area to cover at once
- System demands self reliance; athletes have to adapt to study style (reading) and plan studies
- Coaches should be more active

Recommendations Formulated by Athletes:

- Information on dual career options should be better communicated by sports organisations
- Sports federations should encourage athletes to study
- Support should be provided in summer job/ internship placements
- Recognition of sports should be raised among society, employers and education institutions

2.4. Cooperation in Team Sports in Supporting Players' Study and Career Planning

Juha Mäki-Kokkila - Players' Study Coordinator, Finnish Ice Hockey Association

In team sports, the situation of combining sports and education is more complex than in individual sports. While most athletes have started high school or vocational studies, they have not terminated them and need academic education for their future profession either during or after their sporting career.

In the interest to ensure a combined sports and academic project, the Finnish Ice Hockey Association has established a concept to cooperate with the involved parties and give detailed guidance.

This includes:

- Athletes
 - Develop self-reliance (plan and control own timetables), develop positive attitude towards dual career
- Club and team
 - Create positive atmosphere towards combined project, arrange space and time for studies
- Parents
 - Support athlete, participate in team meetings, cooperate with school
- Education institutions
 - Allow flexibility, cooperate with parents and club/ team

Good Practices:

- Interaction and cooperation in all steps of a dual career involving players, club, league, federation, education institutions, parents
 - Provision of detailed guidance to each stakeholder
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2.5. Sport Organisations' Role in Supporting Dual Career

Susanna Rahkamo-Kokko - President of the Finnish Figure Skating Association/
Board Member of the Finnish Olympic Committee

Sports federations are oftentimes lacking commitment to support dual career projects. Having experienced this situation as an Olympic figure skater, Susanna Rahkamo-Kokko now leads initiatives as President of the Finnish Figure Skating Association.

Recommendations for Sport Organisations to Improve Dual Career Environments in Europe:

- Establish agreements between coaches, sport federations, education institutions to support dual career goals
 - Achieve more cooperation between federations
 - Achieve better funding for grass-roots level activities
 - Finance two years of studies post sports (following Canadian example)
 - Start sport school system at an earlier age: 12 years
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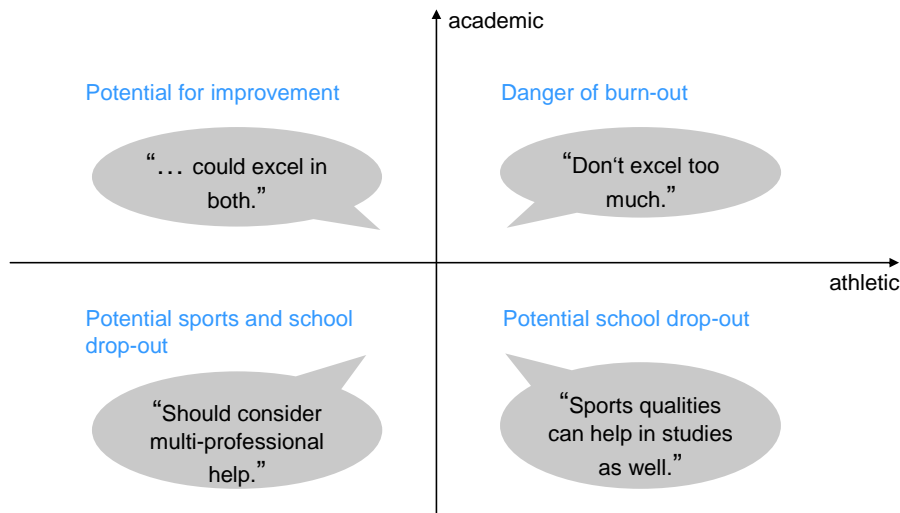
2.6. Role of the Coach in Supporting an Athlete's Dual Career

Mika Kekäläinen - Head Coach of the Swimming Training Center in Helsinki

In an athlete's life, the daily rhythm is crucial for a successful dual career. A coach has to respect and steer both, sporting and academic goals in a way to guarantee a healthy lifestyle for his athlete.

Recommendations for Coaches:

- Coaches have to give advice following the athlete's athletic and academic ambitions:



- Coaches should not allow athletes to become a sports professional if there is no plan B, otherwise, they may find themselves in an unhealthy situation
- Coaches have to create an environment where different personalities are respected

Recommendations on Dual Career in Europe:

- Develop a European equivalent of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA); a European Athletic College System
 - Add 4 years of high-school → athletes would graduate at 22 when being more mature to make decisions
 - Would ensure a degree to serious athletes
 - Would offer financial security in non-professional sports
- If athletes make it to Olympics, they should freely access education

2.7. Video Broadcasting as Practical Tool in Distance Learning

Jukka Sormunen - Principal of Elite Sport School Kuopio

Distance education, e-learning, and videoconferencing in education facilities offer athlete-students the possibility to study while being absent for training or competition purposes. By the means of video broadcasting, they can watch the lesson taught by videoconference via mobile phone, iPad or other solutions.

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) is, among other, supporting this initiative. There are 59 upper secondary schools and 12 vocational schools equipped with video broadcasting, providing 368 e-courses to students. First results have

shown that maths and further difficult distance-learning subjects have performed well.

Advantages:

- Provides equal learning opportunities to all students and athletes
- Athletes can more easily reconcile sports and educational training, also in difficult subjects
- Cost effective system: 4700€/ classroom, standard equipment can be used in every classroom

Recommendations for Establishment among European Nations:

- System set-up
 - Establish an educational private server throughout Europe to connect education institutions; control server by a trustful organisation
 - Have multiple media server clusters to provide a large number of students
 - Use same technology everywhere (videoconferencing terminals, classroom equipment, etc.)
 - Use standard format of Microsoft and Apple
- Advanced education methods
 - Be in favour of a change in education methods: teaching by video conference including increased use of collaborative techniques and project-based assignments
 - Teach educators how to use system
- Networking
 - Establish a national network of supporting organisations
 - Create a European network to learn from existing examples

2.8. Athlete Career Program in Finland

Tommi Törmälä - CEO, Adecco Finland
 Tuuli Merikoski - NOC Finland
 Jenni Mikkonen - Olympic kayaker, student at Technical University of Tampere

In 2004, the Finnish Olympic Committee has signed a non-commercial agreement with Adecco Finland in the interest to provide individual athletes with a smoother transition into labour life. This cooperation follows the approach of the Athlete Career Programme (ACP) established between the IOC and Adecco.

With 250 athletes and coaches in the programme and 100 placements so far, Adecco Finland offers career training and job placement services throughout the country. The programme involves different kinds of companies and sizes.

ACP Success Factors Specific to Finland:

- ⇒ Small elite athlete population
- ⇒ Athletes are well educated
- ⇒ Cooperation is based on trust and commitment to agreed objective
- ⇒ Existing direct contacts to athletes and coaches
- ⇒ Existing cooperation between stakeholders (clubs, Academy, coaches, etc.)
- ⇒ At NOC full-time employee taking care of dual career counselling → good base
- ⇒ At Adecco employee responsible for ACP services

Advantages for Athletes:

- Positive to know that services and contact persons are available
- No worries regarding professional life takes away additional burden, providing the possibility to concentrate on sports only

Recommendations for a Program Transfer to European Nations:

- Achieve commitment and support from national sports organisation
- Provide a full-time employee taking care of dual career issues
- Establish cooperation between stakeholders
- Attract companies by shared values and engagement in sports sponsorship

Areas for Improvement:

- Find employment for active athletes which demands large flexibility on the part of employers

Links: www.eliteathlete.fi; www.olympic.org/eliteathlete

3.0. Conclusion

The study visit has illustrated the prime examples of good practices in the Finnish sports system. Among them are primarily:

- The Sports Academy Network
- Possibilities of Distance Learning by Video Broadcasting
- Athlete Career Program in Finland

The well arranged network of stakeholders within elite sports combined with a flexible study system make joined sports training and studies possible. Especially video broadcasting could be a future means to help tackle some of the timing difficulties in dual career.

Although Finland has a small population and therefore a smaller sports environment to combine under one umbrella it shows an example of effective and committed cooperation giving athletes the possibility to profit of a maximum of sports, education and profession related services.