



Workshop Report  
"Businesses"

Project: AthletesToBusiness (A2B)

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### **1. Introduction**

In the framework of the AthletesToBusiness (A2B) initiative, the second workshop on "Businesses" has been hosted by the Austrian Sports Confederation on 13 July 2010 in Vienna. Enriched by a large number of specialists, the seminar envisaged to capitalize on the amount of experience and expertise at hand to produce recommendations on dual career in the European Union focusing on businesses. The conference was chaired by A2B project manager Michael Trinker.

Participants of the workshop were, among other, members of the IOC and national sport associations, business specialists and experts of education as well as athletes from the FIS, German and EOC Athlete Commissions.

In addition to the preliminary findings of the businesses questionnaire, presentations by the IOC, Adecco and RATP provided insight on existing athlete programmes prior to the workshop.

Functioning as a thought-leader in this process, the IOC has launched a worldwide Athlete Career Programme in collaboration with Adecco in 2005. This initiative is currently in an awareness raising period and has already supported a number of athletes on a global scale.

Initiated by the French Ministry of Sport in 2002, RATP, a French regional transportation enterprise is running an independent athlete recruiting programme and has supported 32 sportsmen so far.

This report aims at summarizing the discussions of the workshop by providing concrete recommendations on an ideal framework for dual career with specific regard to businesses.



## **2. Workshop “Businesses”**

Prior to establishing concrete recommendations and defining priorities for follow-up actions, an ideal situation has been elaborated in the workshop sessions.

### **2.1. Ideal Situation**

#### **Features of Athlete-Friendly Employers**

From an attitude perspective, businesses have a positive and open mindset about employing elite athletes and show a will to change.

Athlete-friendly employers demand competencies and sporting experience over working knowledge. Ideally, they have a special recruiting process in place to filter out athletes. Furthermore, employers look at a long-term contract commitment while being aware of the fact that their return on investment will not be visible immediately.

With respect to working arrangements, employers understand athletes’ priority to focus on their sport career. In this context, leaders provide flexibility around scheduling, including working hours and working days, as well as location. For sportsmen, this leaves room for absences during periods of training and tournaments. In settling into their job, athletes receive personalized job training and are integrated by mentoring.

Internally and externally of the company, employers have good communication about their engagement with athletes. In this respect, inside PR is promoting the athlete’s integration into the business. Outside PR increases visibility and recognition, however, it is conducted sensitively as it touches corporate strategy and could create competition.

#### **Cooperation Between Companies and Other Stakeholders in the Field of Dual Career**

Facing a lack of cooperation between companies and stakeholders in dual career, appropriate measures intended to establish active collaboration are taken. In a role of mediator, sport organisations take the lead in developing recommendations for template agreements involving the stakeholders relevant to this process: National authorities, businesses, educational institutions and athletes.

In a first step, there is a framework agreement between sport organisations and national authorities including paragraphs of co-financing or incentives provided to businesses employing athletes.

Following this process, sport organisations, businesses and educational institutions set up partnerships which could take on the following forms:

a) A framework agreement between sport organisations, educational institutions and businesses provides the athlete with practical knowledge during the education process; The company agrees to provide work experience for the athlete regardless of hiring obligations.

b) A framework agreement between the company and the sport organisation provides employment for active and end of career athletes. In this case,



enterprises ideally consider a long-term engagement looking at a four-year plus contract.

- The company agrees to recruit active athletes and offers working time arrangements adapted to the specific practice of their sport.
- The company agrees to recruit athletes who are at the end of their sporting career.

Further terms of agreement are elaborated by a team of experts and may vary by country depending on the local circumstances and athletes in focus.

### **Companies Have Positive Reasons for Hiring Athletes**

In an ideal situation, cooperation between enterprises and supported athletes results in a win-win relationship.

Businesses receive a benefit from hiring athletes as they make a difference in workforce and can improve bottom-up results. The “athlete character” stands for drive, passion and perseverance and is motivating for colleagues, creating positive employee moral.

### **Companies Overcome Negative Perceptions**

A team of advisors (“trouble shooting team”) helps enterprises to overcome negative perceptions such as fear for reasons of the special status of athletes and feelings of jealousy among colleagues. Agreed flexible arrangements resolve schedule difficulties for both athletes and employers. Additionally, financial support from national authorities lightens the burden of increased expenditures.

### **Ways to Raise Awareness of the Added Value of Athletes among Employers**

As key actors in the process, sport organisations, national authorities, athletes and businesses actively use both, the general media and their network for spreading knowledge. In this regard, sport organisations and national authorities approach economic umbrella organisations to raise awareness of the added value of athletes in business.

As good communicators to the outside world, athletes and athlete commissions promote success stories of sportsmen having gone through the process.

Companies already active in hiring athletes integrate interviews, athlete stories and the corporate perspective in business reviews, magazines and potentially annual reports. Moreover, internal presentations regrouping sportsmen and employees enhance clarity and facilitate fireside chats allowing open and interactive discussions.

Ideally, new businesses to the athlete world commit to attend informational sessions as a source for further engagement.

### **Sources of Support for Companies in Setting Up Athlete Recruiting Programmes and Overcoming Conflicting Hiring Practices**

Good practice examples in terms of success models are provided to companies which are integrated by an advisory group consisting of a central experienced body: A “trouble shooting team” involving sport organisations, athletes, business experts, national authorities, chambers of commerce and educational institutions is created and maintained at regional and national level, and by sports centre. The team acts as a mentor to businesses.



## **How and When Contact between Athletes and Companies Should Be Established**

Both, athletes and companies are approached by sport associations. Contact and communication is also facilitated by athlete commissions, national authorities, chambers of commerce and sport centres.

The earlier athletes are introduced to employment topics, the better prepared they can be. For younger athletes, simple concepts and awareness are introduced in "fun" interactive sessions.

For sportsmen ready to enter the labour market, employer fairs help join athletes and businesses.

Ideally, one organization per country collects available information on dual career and serves as a central point of contact directing athletes to the appropriate service provider according to their needs. It is a recognized body acting as a source of information.

When coming together, companies and athletes are prepared, having knowledge on their expectations and reasons for joining. At this stage, athletes are no longer on an exploratory basis but available for employment.

### **The Role of Athletes**

Athletes have a positive attitude towards the labour market and are open and motivated in response to the unique services offered to them. Ideally, they make use of the current trend among companies to use social networks (facebook, linkedin, twitter) as recruiting channel. This offers athletes the opportunity to be noticed by their "online brand" and to come across selling themselves by their CV only which remains an obstacle in their professional career path.

As effective communicators to their entourage, athletes create blogs to share information with their athlete environment. Athlete Commissions approach society and grass root sportsmen by promoting success stories of dual career.

## **2.1. Recommendations**

Taking into consideration the outlook of an ideal situation, the following recommendations have been addressed to the accordant stakeholders:

### **Athletes and Athlete Commissions**

- Be an active responsible in the process having knowledge on expectations and showing readiness for employment





- Attend employer fairs initiated by sport organisations to enter into direct contact with businesses
- Consider social online networks as a tool for self promotion to the labour market
- Take part in the communication process in the role of efficient communicator to public and grass roots
  - Athletes should create blogs sharing the information with their athlete environment
  - Athlete Commissions should communicate current initiatives providing role models/testimonials of athletes having gone through the process

### **Businesses**

- Commit to attend informational sessions in order to develop an understanding of the value of athletes in business
- Have an open-minded attitude and be willing to change
- Open up general recruitment to athletes and consider the following actions:
  - Take into account a mentor within companies to integrate athletes
  - Envisage flexibility around scheduling to facilitate the combination of a professional and sporting career beneficial to athletes

### **Sport Organisations**

As a key actor in this process, sport organisations should take the lead in developing the movement. This includes the following activities:

- Establish a basic framework
  - Take the lead in the creation of a universal platform of the A2B activation
  - Create an action plan for dual career programmes
  - Guarantee a central person of contact for both, companies and athletes
  - Create a network of relevant stakeholders including national authorities, businesses, educational institutions, federations, coaches and athletes



- Take the lead at communication channels in order to provide more visibility in programmes currently existing
  - Communicate initiatives to public allowing greater recognition
  - Communicate initiatives to athlete commissions and set up information meetings for athletes promoting success examples
  - Approach economic umbrella organisations (chambers of commerce) to spread awareness and enter into contact with businesses
- Consider a financial plan
  - Take over partial financing of project
  - Approach national authorities to achieve co-financing
- Initiate partnerships with businesses
  - Meet company executives of sport sponsors and other companies demanding to attend informational sessions and be open for further engagement
  - Support the implementation of “speed dating” employer fairs helping to join athletes and businesses
  - Implement recommendations for agreement templates addressed to companies as a basis for cooperation
  - Install a mentor system teaching Human Resources on athlete recruiting and provide best practices to help companies set up specific recruiting programmes. Consider a mentor team consisting of experts from businesses, national authorities, chambers of commerce, educational institutions and sport organisations
- Approach educational institutions
  - Collaborate with educational institutions to create a University Sport Forum to spread awareness and exchange dual career practices in informational sessions
- Provide relevant services to athletes
  - Set up a “one stop shop” appointing one entity per country responsible to regroup all available information related to dual career. This organization should be the recognized body in charge of directing athletes to the appropriate service provider in accordance with their needs.



### **Educational Institutions**

- Commit to attend informational sessions in a University Sport Forum in the interest to form a network and adopt good practices
- Show flexibility for change and training
- Communicate dual career engagement inside and outside of the faculty
- Place guidance counsellors in educational institutions to assist athletes with professional career preparations
- Create a network/partnership with businesses and sport organisations in the interest to provide practical experience for student-athletes

### **National Authorities**

- Support a basic legislative framework to secure the development of dual career
- Assemble Ministries of Sport, Education and Commerce together with the sport organisation's executive committee to create a basis for networking and decisive action-taking
- Consider education as a core element in an athlete's dual career
- Play an active role in creating positive perception about athletes in business among society and company leaders through the general media
- Consider a budget for dual career
  - Finance or co-finance dual career programmes
  - Give tax exemptions or incentives to companies hiring athletes
  - Give compensation to businesses providing employment for active athletes paid full-time but working half-time

### **The European Union**

In the interest of carrying dual career activities forward, the European Union should support the following measures:

- Adopt a general directive legislation
- Adopt and influence with pressure to national authorities the recommendations of this group





- Create ERASMUS programmes for sports giving athletes the possibility to study and train in an athlete friendly University institution in Europe
- Provide a budget for dual career
  - Fund the implementation process of AthletesToBusiness
  - Provide financial support to NOCs and educational institutions in setting up a wider framework for dual career

## **2.2. Priorities, Follow-up**

The elaborated recommendations focus primarily on the issues of a) raising awareness and b) establishing contact with businesses and advising them in athlete recruitment.

The workshop revealed that there is a stated lack of knowledge on the value that athletes could bring to business. Therefore, measures to raise awareness and recognition with the employment market have to be implemented to increase placement opportunities of athletes with sponsors and other employers.

In order to provide companies with adequate support services, an evaluation of best practices with regards to athlete recruitment has to be undertaken in the first place. In this context, it is essential to support the establishment of a network leading to the formation of an experienced body that could take on a mentor role for businesses.

Sport organisations should take the lead in promoting and establishing such initiatives along with developing a framework for approaching sponsors and potential employers.

## **3. Conclusion**

This workshop has focused on the objective of identifying an ideal environment for athletes to successfully pursue a professional career. Central to this aspect was how to increase visibility and how to bring together athletes and employers on the labour market.

An ideal situation guarantees general awareness and provides the necessary networks offering support services for businesses, educational institutions and athletes. Companies are willing to employ athletes and offer flexible working arrangements.

Reality reflects some positive opportunities with enterprises; however, there is a substantial need for spreading positive perceptions and teaching companies on athlete recruitment.

Presently, some initiatives are conducted on a national basis (e.g. the RATP programme) initiated by national authorities, Olympic centres or other. On a worldwide level, the IOC Athlete Career Programme is currently in a march of progress.





Nevertheless, there is a considerable need for raising the awareness of existing programmes and extending networking particularly on a national basis to set up dual career measures locally.

While sport organisations should pilot such initiatives, the role of the European Union would be to encourage Member States to support relevant efforts and to provide a budget carrying these undertakings forward.

