Positive and negative aspects of « Sport + Studies Programmes » organized at secondary school level, perceived by athletes and their classmates

In several sports, athletes reaching the world-class level have experienced hard years of practice. Training must be intensive and respect high quality criteria. Today, promising teenagers are enrolled in sport programmes. However, sport career achievement being so hazardous, it is necessary to guarantee the best youths following the way to high level. 

Combining school and sport programmes proposes a school preparation in a natural environment with adapted schedules. In these cases, athletes are gathered in training centres where they combine sports and school preparations. They have few problems encountered to follow successfully the school programme (34.6 %). That category ranked first in the end of the year. Both groups tended to report few changes were observed between the beginning and the end of the school year. Few changes were observed between the beginning and the end of the school year. Both groups tended to report more social drawback as lack of contact within the classes. Principals showed clearly that they were aware of the reality of the sport world. Nevertheless, apart from rare and old studies (Deeven, 1971, 1974) few data were collected within “Sport + Studies Programmes”. In a previous paper, Cloes, Schelings, Ledent & Pieron (2002) compared motivational characteristics and social interactions of athletes and their classmates. 

Both groups experience special teaching conditions. It was surprising that information about their opinions on the unfolding of the activities.

**Goals of the study**

- To identify positive and negative aspects of “Sport + Studies Programmes” pointed out by both athletes and their classmates.
- To analyse the possible changes of these opinions between the beginning and the end of the school year.

**Methods**

This paper focused on their opinions about the programme. Fifty-two athletes and 283 classmates from four secondary schools located in Wallonia filled in a questionnaire in November 1999 and in May 2000. Principals were interviewed in 2001 to comment on the results.

Athletes practised tennis, volleyball, soccer, judo and rugby. All students were 12 to 18 year old.

Open questions aiming to identify positive and negative aspects perceived by youths concerning the “Sport + Studies Programmes” existing in their school. Answers were classified into categories by identifying key words.

Inter analyst reliability reached 80% of agreement.

**Results**

At the beginning of the year, among negative aspects, athletes reported mainly their workload (36.9 %) and the problems encountered to follow successfully the school programme (34.6 %). That category ranked first in the negative opinions of classmates (44.3 %). However, they seemed not very aware of the tiredness of young athletes (8.6 %; z = 7.797; p<.001). They gave also more importance to some constraints endured by the athletes (less freedom, less free time) (11.5 Vs 3.1 %; z = 2.69; p = .002). Athletes and classmates did not assess the problems in the same way. Teachers and educators should take into account differences in the classes. Lack of communication could lead to conflict by misunderstanding.

Few changes were observed between the beginning and the end of the school year. Both groups tended to report more social drawback as lack of contact within the classes.

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, “Sport + Studies Programmes” could be considered as a positive experience. However, some improvement should yet be found to help the student to manage the heavy load in training. Results showed also that classmates were not aware of the problems perceived by athletes. Practical implications could be drawn from this study to help principals in developing new strategies.