

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



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Literature

◆ 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 school preparation to youths following the way to high level.

« It's super cool! »

◆ Combining school and sports programmes is a complex. A wide range of structures around the world. In some countries athletes are gathered in training centres where they combine sports and school preparation opportunities to have contacts with teachers. Rather than cut young athletes off from their school programmes propose a school preparation environment with adapted schedules. Athletes are mainstreamed with non-athletes.

◆ The criteria for success in the "Sport + Studies Programmes" are : (1) availability of specific educators and tutors; (2) medical and scientific staff; (3) equipment; (5) open minded school staff.

◆ The training officers consider usually that "Sports + Studies Programmes" are successful. In Wallonia, the best example of their "products" is indisputably that of the athlete Henin, # 5 at the WTA ranking (October 2002) in athletes; « It's a good thing for the sport in our country ».

◆ Nevertheless, apart from rare and old studies (Deeven, 1971, 1974) few data were collected within "Sport + Studies Programmes". In a previous paper, Cloes, Schellings, Ledent & Piéron (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.

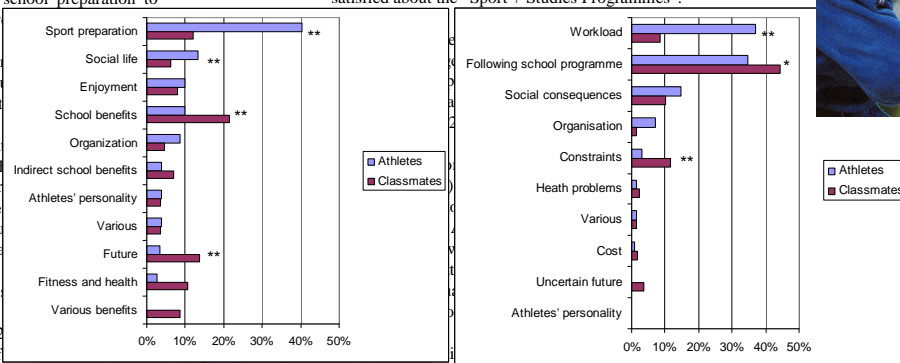
◆ Athletes practised tennis, volleyball, soccer, judo and rugby. All students were 12 to 18 year old.

◆ 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

◆ Athletes reported a mean of 2.9 item for positive aspects and 2.5 for negative ones. Classmates were less productive in their answers with, respectively 1.8 and .5 items. They were less concerned by the project. Moreover, it is noteworthy that there were more positive items than negative ones. That could mean that students were globally satisfied about the "Sport + Studies Programmes".



« Piff! It's too difficult »

◆ At the end of the year, classmates considered that enjoyment and sport preparation were advantages for athletes ($2.3 \leq z \leq 3$; $p \leq .022$). On the other hand, the two main categories identified at the beginning of the year were significantly less mentioned ($1.9 \leq z \leq 2.3$; $p \leq .055$). Classmates could become aware of the reality of the sport world.

◆ 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 %; $z = 2.69$; $p = .007$). 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.

◆ Principals showed clearly that they were aware of the athletes' opinions. They also were able to explain the results of the study in relation to classmates opinions. This underlines their knowledge of what is going on in their school.



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.



◆ Cloes, M., Schellings, V., Ledent, M., & Piéron, M. (2002). Sport-études : comparaison des caractéristiques motivationnelles et des relations sociales des élèves sportifs et de leurs condisciples. *RIEPS* (e Journal de la Recherche sur l'Intervention en Éducation Physique et Sport), 1. Retrieved April 30, 2002 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.fcointe.uflm.fr/recherche/sportetudes.pdf>.

◆ Deveen, M. (1971). Le sport de haute compétition et les études. *Sport*, 53, 34-38.

◆ Deveen, M. (1974). Réflexions sur la vie sportive et sociale des élites francophones, sélection 1973. *Sport*, 65, 32-40.