

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

Cloes Marc*; Schillings Virginie; Ledent Maryse; & Piéron Maurice

Department of Sport and Physical Activities
University of Liège
ISEPK Sart Tilman Bât. B21
4000 LIEGE
Belgium

Tél. : Int 32 (0) 4/366.38.90
e-mail : Marc.Cloes@ulg.ac.be

Preference : poster

Area of presentation: Physical Education

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 sport.

Combining school and sports programmes is particularly complex. A wide range of structures is organized all around the world. In some countries, the best young athletes are gathered in training centres where they combine sports and school preparations. They have few opportunities to have contacts with the social environment. Rather than cut young athletes off from the real life, other programmes propose a school preparation in a natural environment with adapted schedules. In these cases, athletes are mainstreamed with non-athletes classmates.

The criteria for success in these “Sport + Studies Programmes” are : (1) availability of a boarding school with specific educators and tutors; (2) schedule adaptation; (3) medical and scientific staff; (4) facilities and 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 Justine Henin, # 7 at the WTA ranking (April 2002).

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.

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. Interanalyst reliability reached 80% of agreement.

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”.

Among positive aspects, athletes underlined particularly (1) the advantages of the “Sport + Studies Programme” related to the sport preparation (40.4 Vs 12.0 %; $z = 7.746$; $p < .001$), and (2) the gains provided by their social life (13.2 Vs 6.2 %; $z = 2.635$; $p = .008$). Classmates pointed out (1) the direct school gains related to the opportunity to combine school and sport (21.4 Vs 9.9 %; $z = 3.056$; $p = .002$) and (2) the future, a category concerning the opportunity to start a sport career (13.8 Vs 3.3 %; $z = 3.417$; $p < .001$). Athletes paid more attention to positive aspects linked with preferred the activity. Classmates seemed more attentive to the opportunities provided to athletes to get qualification. They also could be influenced by the dream of outstanding careers.

Athletes’ opinion did not change during the year. Nevertheless, 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.

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.

References

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. eJRIEPS (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.fcomte.iufm.fr/recherch/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.