

# Mentoring in a Dual Career in Sports: Systematic Review

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## Abstract

**Aim.** The purpose of this systematic review was to explore and analyze the scientific literature on mentoring in the context of dual careers in sports. This analysis included a detailed examination of the methodologies and approaches employed in mentoring processes, as well as an evaluation of the research outcomes. Special attention was given to how mentor competencies and skills are applied to support athletes in their efforts to successfully manage and integrate their sporting and academic endeavors. The review aimed to identify effective strategies and highlight the critical role of mentoring in facilitating the dual career pathways of athletes, especially within European contexts. This work contributes to understanding the necessary frameworks and support systems required for optimizing dual career outcomes in sports.

**Research results.** All articles emphasize the importance of dual careers in athletes' lives, reflecting various support mechanisms and approaches. Differences primarily manifest in focus groups (athletes, parents, mentors) and in specific areas of dual careers that are emphasized (psychological support, educational programs, international projects). A common feature is the understanding of the challenges of dual careers and the need for multidimensional support that covers both academic and sport's needs. The articles cover a wide spectrum of dual career aspects, ranging from psychological support to specific educational programs for athletes and their parents. Emphasis is placed on mentoring as an essential element of support for athletes' dual careers, highlighting the need for a structured and targeted approach. Support is highlighted as critically important in promoting dual careers, pointing to the necessity for information and resources. International collaboration and funding, especially through the ERASMUS+ program, are emphasized as ways to support dual career initiatives, identifying possible improvements and deficiencies.

**Conclusions.** These articles contribute significantly to the research on dual careers in sports, offering insights into various strategies and practices that can promote successful dual careers for athletes. They indicate that effective support requires an integrated approach that includes both education and sports sectors, as well as the involvement of parents and mentors.

Continuous dialogue and the exchange of best practices at the international level are also vital to provide athletes with the necessary resources and support for a dual career in sports.

**Keywords:** dual career athletes mentor competences methods in sport European universities case study

## Introduction

Athletes often face challenges in combining their sports career with education or work (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012). Alongside this, it is crucial to ensure that athletes do not neglect their academic and professional development. Sports careers are often short-lived, and athletes must be prepared for life after their active sports career. Thus, mentoring in this process is indispensable. The landscape of sports and education often presents athletes with the challenging task of managing dual careers, balancing their athletic commitments with academic pursuits. In the European context, where sports are both culturally significant and systematically nurtured, the need for effective mentoring strategies that can support dual career pathways is particularly acute. This paper aims to explore the role of mentoring in facilitating these dual careers, focusing on the intricate balance athletes must maintain and the support systems that can make this balance feasible and productive.

Athletes have the right to combine their sports and higher education careers (for example, a dual career), but around the world there are differences regarding the recognition of the student-athlete status and the availability of dual career programs and services (Condello, 2019).

Mentors facilitate the career development of the mentee (i.e., in the form of instrumental support), providing the mentee with (a) support, (b) training, (c) protection from difficulties, (d) challenging tasks, and (e) increased professional transparency. In addition, mentors promote the personal growth of the mentee (i.e., psychosocial support) by helping the mentee develop a professional identity, serving as a support figure, showing respect and support, as well as acting as a role model (Lefebvre, 2020).

**Problem.** The research problem is that, although dual career in sports is an increasingly common practice and there is an understanding of its significance in athletes' lives, there is still not enough research on how mentoring can help athletes. Athletes attempt to combine sports and academic life, which requires many resources, including time, energy, and financial resources. However, there are no clearly defined strategies or support systems to help athletes successfully combine these two spheres. An athlete's support network and the assistance they receive are considered the main factors for success in a dual career (Stambulova, 2022). There is a need to study the role and effectiveness of mentoring in the context of dual careers in sports, to help athletes achieve their goals and successfully overcome challenges associated with a dual career.

**Objective.** The primary objective of this research is to delve into the dynamics of mentoring within the dual careers of athletes in the European context, identifying key strategies and methodologies that contribute to successful outcomes for these individuals.

To achieve this objective, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. This review involved an extensive examination of both scientific and methodological literature pertaining to mentoring in dual career sports. The focus was particularly on how these mentoring relationships interact with and support the dual roles athletes engage in, as well as the role of educational and sports organizations in fostering these careers.

**Tasks.** The specific tasks undertaken included studying and analyzing the relevant literature to outline the current state of knowledge and practice in this area. The review also aimed to elucidate the mechanisms through which sports and educational organizations can collaborate more effectively to support dual career athletes. This involves understanding the challenges faced by these athletes and the potential solutions that mentoring can offer within this unique context.

## Materials and Methods

**Search Strategy.** The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar, a comprehensive academic search engine, to gather peer-reviewed articles, theses, conference papers, and reports. The search spanned publications from the years 2019 to 2023. The specific keywords used were “dual career athletes,” “mentor competences,” “methods in sport,” “European universities,” and “case study.” These keywords were chosen to ensure a broad yet relevant capture of the literature surrounding dual careers and mentoring in sports contexts.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.** The initial search yielded 61 publications. To refine this pool and ensure relevance to the research questions, publications were included based on the following criteria: \*Focus on dual careers in sports, specifically within the context of mentoring or mentor competences. \*Relevance to European settings, given the specific cultural and institutional frameworks in European sports education. \*Publications that were available in full text and in English.

**Exclusion criteria included.** Publications outside of the 2019–2023 range.

Studies not specifically addressing dual career contexts or lacking a focus on mentoring. Non-peer-reviewed articles and informal publications.

**Selection Process.** From the initial pool of 61 publications, 11 were selected for detailed analysis. This selection was based on a thorough review of abstracts and, where necessary, full texts, to ensure that each selected publication met the inclusion criteria and contributed valuable insights into the role and effectiveness of mentoring in dual career athletes' lives.

**Data Extraction.** Data were extracted from each selected publication by the primary researcher, focusing on key themes such as the nature and scope of mentoring, competences required for effective mentoring, impacts on athletes' dual career success, and the role of educational institutions and sport organizations. This thematic extraction helped in identifying patterns, gaps, and emergent themes relevant to mentoring in dual careers.

**Data Analysis.** The extracted data were analyzed qualitatively. The analysis aimed to synthesize findings across the selected studies to understand better the current state of research, the effectiveness of different mentoring approaches, and the competences

deemed most critical for successful mentoring. Emphasis was placed on identifying consistent findings, noting discrepancies, and highlighting areas needing further research.

## Results

### Research Summary on Dual Career in Sports and Mentoring

The systematic review and subsequent studies from 2019 to 2023 have provided a comprehensive look into the psychological aspects, transitions, parental roles, environmental factors, and support systems concerning dual career pathways in sports, primarily in European contexts. (Table 1)

### Integration of Psychological and Educational Support

The research initiated by Stambulova and Wylleman in 2019 laid the groundwork by examining the psychological intricacies of athletes' dual careers, establishing a baseline understanding that dual career athletes are not just managing two high-demand roles but are also navigating complex psychological landscapes. Mateu et al.'s 2020 study built on this by exploring the transitional challenges faced by athletes, reinforcing the need for targeted psychological and educational support during critical transition phases such as entering university. (Table 1)

### Role of Parents and Mentors

2021 studies brought attention to the crucial roles played by parents and mentors. Tessitore and colleagues highlighted the underappreciated role of parents in supporting dual careers, suggesting a gap in existing support frameworks that fail to equip parents with the necessary skills and knowledge. Concurrently, the innovative "YODA Mentors" project introduced by Flores-Lopez et al. suggested that mentoring can be significantly enhanced through structured training programs, echoing the need for systematic development of mentorship capacities to support dual career athletes. (Table 1)

### Need for Tailored and Evidence-Based Support Systems

The work by Morris, Lopez-Flores, and Botwina in 2022 demonstrated a stark variability in support services across different European countries, calling for more tailored and evidence-based support systems. This variability indicates that while some countries may have robust support mechanisms, others lag behind, suggesting the potential for significant improvements based on best practices shared among nations. (Table 1)

### Educational Initiatives and Policy Implications

Capranica and colleagues' development of an online educational program for parents in 2022 showcased an innovative approach to extending support beyond athletes to their families, emphasizing the ecosystemic nature of support needed for dual career success. This aligns with the findings of Abele, Abelkals, and Liduma in 2023, who discussed historical and growth opportunities, indicating a clear direction for policy interventions that should focus on comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and longitudinally beneficial support systems. (Table 1)

### **Skills and Competencies for Sustainable Management**

Lastly, the systematic review by Guidotti et al. in 2023 brought to light the crucial skills and competencies needed not just by athletes but by those managing and supporting them. This emphasizes a broader scope of capacity building that extends into sports management, underlining the need for continuous professional development and strategic planning capabilities within sport institutions. (Table 1)

These studies collectively emphasize the complex and multi-faceted nature of dual careers in sports, suggesting continuous need for integrated, innovative, and supportive measures to assist athletes in successfully managing their dual career demands.

### **Discussion**

The series of studies reviewed from 2019 to 2023 underline a growing scholarly interest in the multifaceted challenges faced by dual career athletes, particularly in Europe. This discussion seeks to integrate findings across these studies, highlighting key themes and potential directions for future research and policy development.

Collectively, these studies advocate for a holistic approach to supporting dual career athletes, which involves not only addressing immediate educational and psychological needs but also constructing a supportive infrastructure that includes parents, mentors, and sports administrators. The discussion points towards an integrated model where multidisciplinary efforts converge to provide a sustainable support system that adapts to the evolving needs of dual career athletes. Future research should thus focus on cross-national studies to further standardize best practices and explore innovative support mechanisms that can be tailored to fit diverse cultural contexts and individual needs.

### **Conclusions**

These articles contribute significantly to the research on dual careers in sports, offering insights into various strategies and practices that can promote successful dual careers for athletes. They indicate that effective support requires an integrated approach that includes both education and sports sectors, as well as the involvement of parents and mentors. Continuous dialogue and the exchange of best practices at the international level are also vital to provide athletes with the necessary resources and support for a dual career in sports.

The articles cover a wide spectrum of dual career aspects, ranging from psychological support to specific educational programs for athletes and their parents. Emphasis is placed on mentoring as an essential element of support for athletes' dual careers, highlighting the need for a structured and targeted approach. Support is highlighted as critically important in promoting dual careers, pointing to the necessity for information and resources. International collaboration and funding, especially through the ERASMUS+ program, are emphasized as ways to support dual career initiatives, identifying possible improvements and deficiencies.

Table 1

**Overview of Research Publications and Methods on Mentoring in Dual Careers in Sports (2019–2023)**

Year	Journal/Site	Authors	Title	Methods	Key notes
2019	Psychology of Sport and Exercise/ Science direct	Stambulova N.B., Wylleman P.	Psychology of athletes' dual careers: A state-of-the-art critical review of the European discourse	Systematic Review, Meta-Analyses	Reviewed the psychology of athletes' dual careers and critically evaluated the European discourse
2020	Frontiers	Mateu P., Inglés E., Torregrossa M., Francisco R., Marques R., Natalia Stambulova N., Vilanova A.	Living Life Through Sport: The Transition of Elite Spanish Student-Athletes to a University Degree in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences	Semi-structured Interviews	The study examined the transition of elite Spanish student-athletes to physical activities and sports science degree studies, emphasizing the challenges and the need for support.
2021	Psychology of Sport and Exercise/ Science direct	Tessitore A., Capranica L., Pesce C., Bois de N., Gjaka M., Warrington G., MacDonncha C., Doupona M.	Parents about parenting dual career athletes: A systematic literature review.	Systematic Review	The role of parents in supporting their children's dual careers and the shortcomings in information: The limited scope and diversity of the research affect the generality of the findings, and the need for an educational program for parents is emphasized to improve parental support and mitigate potential negative consequences.
2021	Psychology of Sport and Exercise/ Science direct	Storm L.K., Henriksen K., Stambulova N.B., Cartigny E., Ryba T.V., Brandt de K., Ramis Y., Erpič S.C.	Ten essential features of European dual career development environments: A multiple case study	Case study, cross-case analysis with focus groups, comparative analysis	Identified ten essential features that make up an effective dual career development environment in Europe: DC support team, integrated environment, clear understanding, mentoring, access to expert support, whole person approach, empowerment approach, flexible solutions, athlete welfare
2021	Cultura ciencia y deporte/ Lietuvos Sporto Universitetas	Flores-Lopez M., Penado M., Avelar-Rosa B., Paskeviciute A., Abelkalns I.	May the mentor be with you! An innovative approach to the Dual Career mentoring capacitation	Project description – interviews, training model development	“YODA Mentors” makes a significant contribution to the improvement of the support system for dual-career athletes by creating a new category of professionals – dual-career mentors, who are prepared to work with young athletes to help them achieve their educational and sports goals.

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Table 1 (continued)

Year	Journal/Site	Authors	Title	Methods	Key notes
2022	International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics	Morris R., Lopez-Flores M., Botwina G.	An international analysis of dual careers support services for junior athletes in Europe	Multiple comparative case study, data collection, mutual analysis	In seven countries, 10–36 support service systems for young dual career athletes in seven countries, each country provides financial support to athletes, high schools lack comprehensive support. The study emphasizes the need for tailored support systems for young people and calls for the development of evidence-based support schemes
2022	PLOS ONE	Izzicupo P., Baldassare di A., Ghinassi B., Abelkalns I., Bisenieks U. and others	Exploring dual career quality implementation at European higher education institutions: Insights from university experts	Online survey questionnaire, expert opinions	Training/mentor, psychological support for athletes (assistance/teacher area), individual study plans and distance learning (educational program requirements area), athletes' awareness and knowledge of dual career issues (social support area), and access to educational spaces (logistical support area)
2022	Frontiers	Capranica L., Guidotti F., Goncalve C., Blondel L., Bovis M., Costa R., Debois N., Figueiredo A., MacDonncha C., Pecnikar-Oblak V., Patoret J.L., Pišl A., Templet A., Doupona M.	Development of an Online Multilingual Educational Programme for Parents of Dual-Career Athletes: A Participatory Design	Triangulation, qualitative and quantitative method, involvement of experts, EMPATIA multidimensional analysis	Developed an online multi-lingual education program for parents of athletes that supports dual careers. Why? What? How? Where?
2023	SOCIETY. INTEGRATION. EDUCATION. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference	Abele A., Abelkalns I., Liduma A	The historical aspect of dual career in eu and growth opportunities in Latvia	Analysis of the report	Looks at the historical aspect of dual career development in Europe and growth opportunities in Latvia.

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Table 1 (continued)

Year	Journal/Site	Authors	Title	Methods	Key notes
2023	Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte	Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte	Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte	Critical analysis and review	Looks at the historical aspect of dual career development in Europe and growth opportunities in Latvia.
2023	Sustainability Sport Management Growth	Guidotti F., Demarie S., Ciaccioni S., Capranica L.	Knowledge, Competencies, and Skills for a Sustainable Sport Management Growth: A Systematic Review	A systematic review	<p>General analysis of important skills and competences required in the field of sports management, based on literature review and data from the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Professions Platform (ESCO).</p> <p>Strategic Planning and Management: The ability to develop and implement strategies that meet organizational goals and needs.</p> <p>Financial Management: Skills in budget management, financial planning and analysis.</p> <p>Marketing and Communication Skills: Ability to successfully promote sports events and programs through various marketing and communication channels.</p> <p>Human Resource Management: Competencies in managing employees, including selection, training and motivation.</p> <p>Problem Solving and Decision Making: Ability to identify problems and respond quickly by making informed decisions.</p> <p>Understanding Technology and Information Systems: Knowledge of modern technology and how it can be used to improve the effectiveness of sports management.</p>



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