



# IMPROVING DUAL CAREER SUPPORT FOR PLAYERS

Best Practice, Good Governance &  
Innovative Ideas for Player Associations

 **EU ATHLETES**  
EUROPEAN ELITE ATHLETES ASSOCIATION



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# INTRODUCTION

The importance of dual career support for elite athletes is now recognised by the European Union and national governments. This is great, but the most important thing is that the athletes themselves realise the importance of dual career preparation during their sporting lives and plan ahead.

This guide is primarily for Player Associations to help them improve their support for their athletes on dual career. It draws upon the experiences of the members of EU Athletes during their exchange visits across Europe in 2014 and the dual career conference for Player Associations in Helsinki in 2014. It contains examples of innovative ideas, good governance structures and best practice.

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➔ INNOVATIVE IDEAS,  
GOOD GOVERNANCE  
STRUCTURES  
& BEST PRACTICE

CONFERENCE  
FOR PLAYER  
ASSOCIATIONS IN  
HELSINKI IN 2014



## SPECIFICITY OF PROFESSIONAL SPORT DUAL CAREERS

A lot of dual career support from government and federation is based around the idea of allowing athletes to finish their university studies whilst still getting ready to perform at elite level in the traditional Olympic sports.

Professional sport brings a different set of issues as the Player Associations are more often encouraging older (24+) athletes to return to education or vocational training at the back end of their careers. This is not to downplay the importance of promoting a learning culture for youngsters in professional sport but rather a recognition of the specific nature of professional sport.

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE 50,000+ PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES IN EUROPE ARE RECOGNISED AS A DISTINCT GROUP WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS.

WHAT IS BEST PRACTICE FOR THE OLYMPIC SPORTS MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE FOR PROFESSIONAL SPORTS.

## WHAT IS DUAL CAREER?

We must always be aware that dual career support for athletes is not just about university education.



Dual career initiatives should at their core be about personal development of the athlete off the field of play. At its best, dual career work will explore an athlete's identity outside the game and their emotional wellbeing. It may involve practically supporting them to achieve basic literacy standards, school qualifications, how to write a CV and job application courses. Other key areas can include helping players to learn a trade, foreign languages, basic computer skills and even entrepreneurial support.

One of the key targets for dual careers is simply to get players to have better **self awareness** and **motivation to get back into the mind-set of learning** new skills and **thinking about how they can become a better person** and have an impact off the field of play during and after their career as an elite athlete.

# GOOD GOVERNANCE

Player Associations are set up and governed by players. It is essential for their effective operation that the players have ownership of their association and that they meet the key personnel involved in representing them. There really is no alternative to hitting the road for regular team visits to engage with the member athletes.

## PLAYER ASSOCIATIONS SET UP AND GOVERNED BY PLAYERS



**If you are not doing regular team visits then you are not really functioning as a proper player association.**

**Dual career advice and support for players should be one of the fundamental priorities for all Player Associations.**

It is often possible to work in partnership with the sports federation on dual career due to the recognition by all stakeholders that this is an important area. While this is welcome, it is important that PDMs remain independent of team structures so that the players' personal development remains the primary focus.

Good governance and experience from different associations suggests that there is a clear benefit in Player Associations trying to separate out the role of dual career support and the potentially more confrontational functions of a sports trade union. This is perhaps best done by having different personnel involved, although this may of course not always be possible.

**There are a number of governance models used by Player Associations but one of the best is through a dedicated Player Development Manager (PDM) section.**

This is the preferred model of EU Athletes and many member Player Associations, though it may need to be adapted for different countries. Other models include the employment of outside education consultants (SICO in Sweden) and the setting up of a separate legal entity (such as the Jockeys Education and Training Scheme in the UK).

**Player Development Managers are the regular proactive interface between the player and their association.**

Their core job focus is on engaging with the member players and acting as a signpost for the Player Association's services.

Obviously resources are an issue in almost every association. Whilst some associations have one PDM for three clubs, others have one for 30 clubs. Nevertheless there can be innovative ways of supporting athletes dual career and creating an effective volunteer structure.

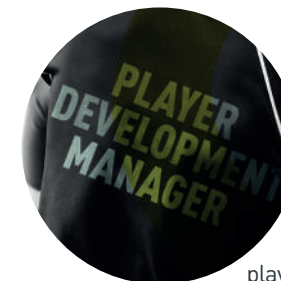


## BEST PRACTICE

example

**The Gaelic Players Association (GPA)** is working on a model of developing a player Rep Team in each squad to act as its representative group for the players association. These four or five volunteers from each squad are provided with training to help them support their fellow players and to also form an integral part of the running of their national player association. This training is a form of Continuous Professional Development for the Rep Team who value it as part of their own dual career preparation. It also helps to create a more effective and engaged volunteer network. Such a volunteer based system can be a cost efficient way of establishing player support networks.

# ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGER



Player Development Managers are the friendly face of the players association. Their role is to develop good relations with players and encourage personal development off field.

Many PDMs will also need to develop good working relationships with players' clubs and federations. This can be a delicate balancing act but is usually in the best interests of the players to do so. Nevertheless it is essential that any Player Association staff, especially a PDM, always works for the best interests of the players.

Dual career is important but PDMs generally have a wider remit including anti-doping education, match fixing information, commercial issues, entitlements advice and providing impartial advice to players at all stages of their careers.



## BEST PRACTICE

example

**The UK's Professional Cricketers Association's personal development programme has two major aims:**

- To improve the performance of cricketers through easing and minimising potential distractions during their playing career.
- To better prepare cricketers for life after cricket.

The first of these targets is a direct benefit to the club and will help improve players' performance and reduce problems. Typical examples can be running alcohol awareness courses and providing training in social media, two areas that can cause major problems for players and their employers.

Running courses on areas that are a direct benefit to the employer as well as the player can be a great way to build up a positive relationship with clubs. This will help sports to see the value of dual career and PDMs.

Whilst a good relationship with clubs is important it is essential that PDMs are trusted by players with confidential information and also to give independent advice that is in the best interests of the players. Trust is one of the key attributes needed for a PDM.

**A PDM SHOULD NOT BE AN EXPERT IN ALL AREAS BUT WORKS BEST WHEN THEY ACT AS A SIGNPOSTING SERVICE FOR MORE TECHNICAL ADVICE AND SPECIALIST SUPPORT.**

It is essential that PDMs know and recognise the limits of their knowledge and pass players onto specialists when necessary.

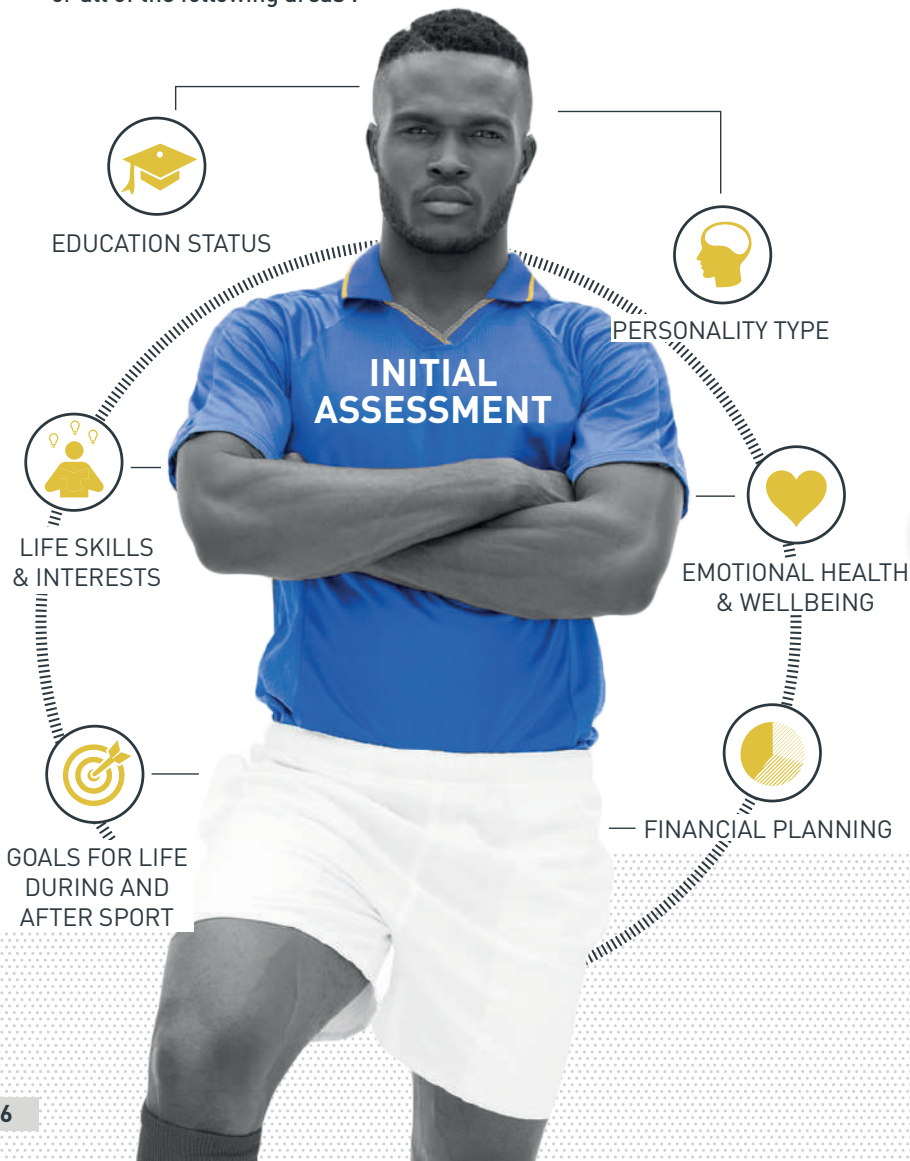
A good PDM will not spoon-feed players but rather empower them to make their own decisions. A PDM should walk by their side rather than leading players or following them on their journey.

It is important to consider the mix of skills necessary to make a good PDM. Whilst many associations employ ex-players there is an increasing number of women successfully working as PDMs within the traditional male sports.



# DUAL CAREER ► WHERE TO START ?

The key to good dual career advice for any Player Associations is to undertake an initial assessment of the individual player. Every association that works well on dual career starts with assessing players. This will reveal more about the player in some or all of the following areas :



Such an initial assessment is the foundation for all subsequent interactions. The actual assessment can be done on-line with the results forming a basis for the development of an action plan for players. Although an on-line approach will be cost efficient, most players will require more one-on-one dedicated time and support to help implement the results.

## BEST PRACTICE example

**The Jockeys Education and Training Scheme (JETS) in the UK runs a successful dual careers award every year which has been covered on television. This award is for the jockey who has made the best career transition and includes a financial bursary for the winners to assist with training costs. An important part of the award is the high profile it gives to jockeys preparing for life after sport and it also very importantly taps into athletes' competitive streak by making dual career preparation a competition with short term winners.**

## ► WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO ?

**The next step can often be to help the player to develop a Personal Development Plan.**

This is a plan to help the player write down and agree on some of his or her goals for life during and after sport and then to work out what they need to do in order to achieve them.

A Personal development plan is an active, action plan based on the players' self-awareness, values, goal-setting and planning for personal development within the context of a dual career including life during and after sport.

It is obviously important that players be in a good position to learn and develop a plan. This may require that some personal problems are dealt with before any longer term planning can happen. This is the area where the personal touch and empathy of PDMs really comes into its own.



## ► HELPING PLAYERS REACH THEIR GOALS

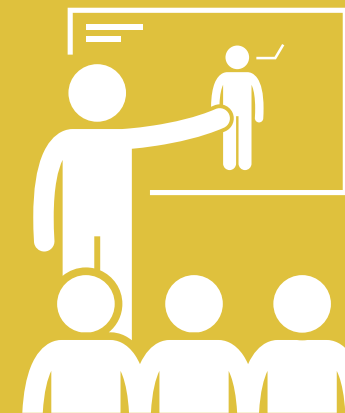
Many people believe, with good reason, that developing a Personal Development Plan is a major dual career achievement.

But a good plan needs to be a living document with short, medium and long term goals that is regularly reviewed and assessed. **The PDMs also have a vital role to play in helping players to work out how to progress towards their goals.**

Experience has shown that it can be excellent dual career process to support a player to reach a point where they find fulfilment or motivation for life outside the game. This can be achieved by going through a robust personal development planning process and having an active plan. It is good practice to support this plan with experimental learning and shorter areas of study until a player feels he has gained competence and skills required to pursue their passions.

It is also worth remembering that a player trying and discarding a trade or course can still be a positive dual career outcome. A number of associations have found it helpful to run short taster courses for its players so that they can try different career ideas out before committing to full time training courses. In at least one example a player changed his mind about becoming a plumber because he was too large to fit comfortably under sinks!

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN



**ACTION PLAN BASED ON**  
the players' self-awareness, values, goal-setting and planning for personal development within the context of a dual career including life during and after sport.

# SOME THOUGHTS ON COMMUNICATION & LEARNING STYLES

Despite the wonders of modern technology there is no replacement for good old fashion face-to-face meetings, at least in the first instance. This can be through a group discussions, one-on-one meetings or structured workshops.

There are now many different ways to communicate with players, almost all of which will have a place for modern Player Associations. It is about getting the right balance and also using the right means for the right message.

Be aware that different people take on board information in different ways. There are different learning styles which we need to be aware of to help maximise the effectiveness of communications with players. These include

## THE DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES



**VISUAL**  
pictures, images & videos



**VERBAL**  
words in both speech and writing



**LOGICAL**  
learn best using reasoning and systems



**SOCIAL**  
prefer to learn in groups



**SOLITARY**  
prefer to self study

Try to cover as many different styles as you can in your communications with players.

Published magazines are expensive to produce and mail out but they have two great advantages : (1) players families will often read them and (2) they enable you to go deeper on particular topics.

Videos can be great at getting messages out to people who learn visually. These can be done relatively cheaply and distributed via social media and the internet.

**Each Player Association should have at least a presence on the social media that your players are using whether its Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.**

These different social networks can be cheap to run but they do require significant staff time to run them well.

Helping players to set up LinkedIn (and other social media) accounts can be a great way of helping athletes manage their reputation and build profile during their playing career in preparation for their second careers, due to its popularity amongst working professionals. It will also help improve the association's communications with players.

Team talks and one-on-one discussions should always be the cornerstone of any communications plan. But you should ask players how they want to be communicated to. A communications audit of a few players could give you some very interesting results when you ask them how they want to be contacted with messages.

Structured or facilitated workshops can also provide an excellent format for player meetings. They allow members the opportunity to get more involved, freely express their views and discuss topics in a safe environment. The Gaelic Players Association now conducts all its member group meetings in this format as they have been so successful and feedback from members has been so positive. They are now trying to move from the "stand and transmit" to workshop model wherever possible.



## ▶ AN EASY WIN-WIN

Many Player Associations would love a dedicated media person. At the same time many players want to get into the communication industry. By offering placements to players to work on their communications, the associations can gain valuable and innovative help whilst also providing players with real life job experience that will look good on their CVs. And as an added bonus the associations build a stronger relationship with its members



## BEST PRACTICE

example

**The AJFS, the association for indoor footballers in Spain,** has produced an excellent on-line video of a well known player who failed to prepare for life after sport. The video shows the difficulties an ex-player faces in his new life as he has to live with his parents again and work as a waiter to make ends meet. This powerful testimony is designed to scare players into thinking about the future.

# THE BIG INFLUENCES

| The two biggest influences on players' dual career decisions tend to be their family and teammates.

## ▶ FAMILY

A good PDM should be aware of a player's wider life outside of sport.

When it comes to dual careers and any other big decision it is often worthwhile asking for a meeting at the players home when their partners are present. This allows PDMs to have a better understanding of a player's life as well as helping to engage their partner in key decisions. Life plans that are supported by a player's partner are more likely to be successful.

One of the first questions to ask a retiring athlete and their family is often : "Where would you like to live?" Players will often have travelled widely following their work and therefore need to think about the next steps now that they are no longer tied to a club. Where a player choses to live will often have a big impact upon their career choices.

It can also be helpful for partners to understand the financial and emotional impact of career transition for players to learn what are the dangers signs which suggest a player is having emotional problems.

**IT IS A SAD FACT THAT MANY PLAYERS STRUGGLE WITH CAREER TRANSITION AND KNOWING WHERE TO GO FOR HELP IS ESSENTIAL FOR A GOOD LIFE AFTER SPORT.**



## ▶ TEAMMATES

Teammates can have either a positive or negative impact on players dual career choices. This is something that Player Associations need to study and if necessary take steps to overcome any negative influences from the clubs culture.

In an ideal world, the senior players and club officials are all supportive of dual career preparations and it is expected that everyone is actively preparing for life after sport. However it can take a lot of dedicated work and a significant amount of time to reach this point. Many clubs will have an attitude where dual career is more of an after-thought or even actively discouraged, so the role of the PDM and Player Association becomes even more important.

If there is a negative influence from other players or indeed within a sport then there will be benefit in directly targeting this negative influence. The association needs to look at developing a communication strategy to promote dual careers to their members as part of a campaign to promote demand for dual career support. There are a number of ways of doing this with some great innovative ideas out there, some of which are listed below.

**THESE IDEAS GENERALLY WORK ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT PLAYERS LISTEN TO OTHER PLAYERS AND THAT POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXAMPLES OF CAREER TRANSITION CAN BE POWERFUL MOTIVATORS OF CHANGE.**



## BEST PRACTICE

examples



**The SNB, the French basketball players association,** has set up a network of former players who are now working in different careers. This network works on many levels. It is a powerful advocate group to current players showing the range of different careers that are available. It provides a potential mentoring system for players interested in certain jobs as well as providing secondment and work experiences places for players.

**The Professional Players Federation in the UK** ran some innovative research into how athletes coped with the transition to life after sport. This research gained national prominence in the media showing that many athletes struggled to feel in control of their lives in the two years after finishing playing. One of the key factors identified in making a successful transition was how well the player had prepared for life after sport.

**The AJFS, as well as many other Player Associations including the Professional Cricketers Association,** also encourages its players to think about lifetime income and expenditure based upon typical average salaries for various jobs. This is powerful because it asks players how much money they think they will need when they finish playing sport. This then leads on to average salaries for different jobs and the entry criteria for them, especially qualifications.



**The GPA's Rep Team structure** mentioned earlier has been found to help to increase engagement between players on important dual career issues. By effectively picking four players from a club to support on dual career and act as ambassadors it helps to crystallise other players' thoughts on dual career and can help to shift the groups thinking.

THERE ARE MANY OTHER EXAMPLES OUT THERE INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS, POSTERS AND REGULAR NEWSLETTERS ON DUAL CAREER.

BUT ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND EASIEST WAYS IS TO BRING A RECENTLY RETIRED PLAYERS TO TALK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF CAREER TRANSITION.





# TRAINING FOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS

**Anyone giving advice to players about their life, career, education and continuous professional development needs to practice what they preach. A good PDM should lead by example and regularly improve their skills through courses.**

It is important that employers of PDMs and dual career support staff prioritise ongoing training and are seen to be active in looking after the career development of their own staff with dedicated training budgets and time set aside each year for education.

The role of PDMs and more general player advisers on dual careers is a relatively new job sector. In many countries there tends to be no specific job qualifications or courses developed for people wanting to become PDMs. This can be seen as a problem or an opportunity. This lack of structure

enables people to choose helpful short courses according to individual PDMs needs and goals. It could also enable people to set up their own qualifications as happened in the UK.

A baseline entry level qualification has been developed by the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) for people working with athletes on dual career. This is called the Talented Athletes Lifestyle Support (TALS) award and is a European Qualifications Framework level 4 course which is a mixture of theory and practice. The core components of the course are :



Whilst the above TALS is an entry level qualification, many PDMs will do specific courses that may not be directly sports related but can help improve their job performance, for example Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

Another important way of improving PDMs skill base is through regular meetings with fellow professionals to share advice and knowledge. In the UK, the Professional Players Federation has set up a forum for education and training that meets three times a year and brings together fifteen different associations from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland across a wide range of different sports.

EU Athletes is also examining the possibility of bringing together PDMs and player support advisers from across Europe to specifically focus on dual career issues and share best practice. In the meantime it will continue to encourage Player Associations to informally share knowledge and experiences.

**IMPROVING PDMS SKILL BASE IS THROUGH REGULAR MEETINGS WITH FELLOW PROFESSIONALS TO SHARE ADVICE AND KNOWLEDGE.**



# MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS ?

It is obviously important for every job to be able to demonstrate and prove its effectiveness and for line managers to be able to evaluate the work being done. Player Development and dual career support are no exceptions.

However it is not easy to measure the effectiveness of interventions. Experience from many different Player Associations shows that this is an area which needs to be handled carefully. As with all targets there is a danger of employees just working to targets and ignoring harder cases who most need support on dual careers.

It is possible to monitor the number of players who have been through initial assessments and/or have subsequently created a Personal Development Plans. This is seen by many to be a reasonable measure of effectiveness but it is not perfect.

It is also possible to monitor the number of interventions that PDMs make with their players but again there is a danger of encouraging quantity over quality.

Perhaps the best measure of effectiveness is to question the players over the quality of the support and advice they receive. A standard questionnaire could enable the sport to make comparisons across different clubs and over time. However as with many people focused industries there is no real substitute for listening to customers and working closely with staff to develop appropriate and specific assessment targets.

It is likely that any outside funding from either government or the sports federation will require one of the above measurements to monitor effectiveness and they should therefore be taken seriously.



**PLAYER ASSOCIATIONS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT ANY EVALUATION OF DUAL CAREER SUPPORT IS IN ITSELF AN EXCELLENT PROMOTIONAL TOOL TO HIGHLIGHT THE GOOD WORK THAT IS BEING DONE. LAUNCHING THE EVALUATIONS IN THE MEDIA CAN GENERATE POSITIVE NEWS STORIES ON DUAL CAREERS WHILST ALSO SHOWING THE VALUE OF THE PLAYER ASSOCIATION'S WORK.**

# CONCLUSION

**Dual career support needs to be a major area of focus for all Player Associations.**

This will bring many benefits to the associations including better relations with sports stakeholders; improved engagement and communication with players; and better support from members.

**Evidence is emerging from Australia that dual career preparation can also help improve current sports performance for players.**

It is also one of the major influences in how athletes adapt to their life after sport and the contribution they go on to make to society.

Dual career is a relatively new area for many professional sports but an exciting one which offers many challenges and opportunities. EU Athletes is here to help make sure that our members lead the way in developing and delivering best practice for the benefit of the professional and elite athletes in Europe.

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