

# **ProMobility**

## **Good Practice Booklet**



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ProMobility is a project funded by the European Union under the call for proposals Exchanges and Mobility in Sport 2020. The project is coordinated by European Elite Athletes Association (EU Athletes) and focuses on mobility exchange and job shadowing between sports trade unions and professional player associations in Europe and South Africa. The project has been implemented between January 2021 and December 2022, including 16 participating athlete associations representing athletes from different countries and sports.

# Table of content

1. Introduction
2. Player recruitment and engagement (as members of player association)
3. Response to the COVID-19 pandemic
4. Communications and media
5. Player development
6. Commercial operations and marketing
7. Conclusion
8. Contact

# Introduction

ProMobility project aims to support staff mobility and learning between player associations. The project helps to identify, share and expand good practice in supporting elite athletes through their associations.

The player associations participating in the project represent more than 10,000 elite athletes. Therefore, the project positively influences these players as it helps to enhance the quality of work and support that the player associations can offer them.

The main topics of the project are:

- Player recruitment and engagement (as members of player associations)
- Player personal development
- Commercial development and marketing
- Communications and media
- Response to the Covid-19 pandemic

These topics have been explored through online and in-person exchanges between the staff of player associations and correspond with the chapters of this booklet. The purpose of the booklet is to gather and share good practices identified. Any athlete association or player union, as well as any other organization whose aim is to support athletes, can benefit from ideas and practical advice that has been gathered during the ProMobility project.

# Player recruitment and engagement

No player association can exist without having members. Consequently, effective recruitment of players is one of the main tasks for all associations but having good sign-up rates is not enough for a well-functioning organisation. The associations that truly represent the collective voice of the athletes also work hard on the engagement and commitment of their members.

## United by common purpose and values

Being a member of an association should make players feel united by a common purpose and give them a sense of being a part of a strong movement striving towards protecting and advancing athletes' rights and interest.

To convince players to join the association, it is helpful to define the mission statement of the association and the values that it subscribes to. To define the mission, try to find an issue or a set of issues that matters the most to the players in your sport and make an emphasis in your operations on that issue. It is essential to follow the ongoing feedback from the players. In this case, the members will feel engaged, listened to and important.

## Benefits for the players

Tangible benefits should not be seen as separate from intangible ones. On the contrary, they should rather be a practical realisation of your values and goals. The range of services you offer for the members will probably vary and expand over the years given that the industry trends, the interests of members as well as the budgets change.

- Player development and education
- Day-to-day counselling services on various matters (e.g., contracts and legal aspects, integrity issues)
- Collective rights commercialisation (see *Commercial operations and marketing*)
- Scholarships provided by educational institutions or players associations study grants.
- Special offers and discounts with partnering brands
- Information materials (publications, brochures, newsletter, etc.)

## Face-to-face team visits

Team visits are an essential component of the player association's operations. They present a helpful way of establishing more personal contact with players and hearing directly from them. Team visits help to both recruit new players and interact with the ones who are already members. The women's futsal players association in Spain (AJFSF) organises their team visits in accordance with the following principles:

1. The suggested timing of the meeting is between 30 and 45 minutes.
2. It is beneficial if someone familiar or close to the team comes to the visit. In this case, the chances of building a trustful and engaging conversation are higher, hence, more players are likely to join the association. In addition, the cost of a team visit drops if someone local comes and no long travel is required.
3. Having at least one or two players per team who are current members of the association helps to involve other teammates.
4. Taking paper inscriptions to the meeting is recommended because it allows recruiting new players right on the spot.



5. Presentation or speech should be prepared beforehand. Take into consideration that some details could be different for each team.
6. Organising a small competition or open questions during the visit and rewarding the winners is one of the strategies to maintain the attention of the players during the visit.
7. While organising the team visit, it is preferable to first contact the players and seek the cooperation of the clubs later.

### **Engagement**

Engagement of players may present difficulty especially when it involves young active players who may have many other tasks and priorities on their lists. The following tips might help the player associations that aim to improve player engagement:

1. Involve active players in strategic and operational planning to make sure that the range of the association's activities is topical to the members.
2. Consider the needs and feedback given by the players to adjust the association's activities accordingly.
3. Inform the members about the services offered and the benefits of these to the players. People are unlikely to know your operations unless they read it from the association's communication or hear about it. Therefore, it is important to regularly report on activities to inform the players about past achievements, current work and future plans.
4. Take a personalised approach, for example, when doing consulting services related to education and career matters.
5. Support player activism when a player wants to deliver a statement to other players, promote an initiative and inspire other players for a change. It is important that the player associations provide a platform (social media, website, etc) to express themselves and speak on name of all as a united voice protecting individual or particular possible actions against players who raise their voices.
6. Engage with players in a more informal environment, for instance, through the association's social media. Encourage athletes to share their thoughts and listen carefully to their opinions.

# **Response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly influenced the life and work styles of many people in the majority of industries. Sport is not an exception. Because of the special measures, many athletes did not have the possibility to train or compete in their sport. Athletes were in a vulnerable situation, especially those who were deprived of their workers status and associated rights. Player associations, however, became even more active in supporting athletes, especially in the areas of player development, mental health, legal advice. They have also established new ways of working adapted to the unprecedented situation.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic may be over soon, it showcased how the sport sector operates in times of crisis. To make sure the sport sector stays resilient to potential crises, sport organisations need to work towards societal, economic and environmental sustainability. This also implies that decision-making within the should be done through dialogue with athletes and player associations.

## **Virtual club visits**

Since face-to-face meetings and travelling were restricted, keeping updated about athletes' needs and concerns became a challenge for a lot of player associations. One of the positive initiatives was to switch from face-to-face team visits to virtual ones. The common solution was to organise virtual visits via Zoom or other video conferencing platforms. On the one hand, it allowed reaching out to athletes who usually could not attend meetings with their associations for various reasons, but on the other hand, it became harder to keep the athletes engaged in the discussion.

To achieve better engagement, it is recommended to organise meetings/webinars on the topics that are highly relevant to the athletes and/or offer services for which athletes might not have as much time available in normal circumstances (education, career development, personal wellbeing and mental health, etc.).

## **Collective salary cuts**

Matches and competitions were strictly limited during the COVID-19 pandemic, and consequently, less money was earned on ticketing, broadcasting and sponsoring. In such circumstances, the protection of athletes as workers should become a top priority to make sure that athletes can get some income even if they cannot practice their sport.

To approach this difficult and unpredictable situation, MyPlayers, for example, participated in collective salary cuts for almost everyone in the industry, including players but also coaches, management, and general staff. The salary cuts were proportional, with minimum or no deductions for those with smaller incomes. Ultimately it was considered that the collective salary cuts protected the players and ensured that no further cost-saving measures and/or retrenchment of players occur. Nevertheless, the players were free to terminate their fixed-term contracts before the salary cuts if they wish to do so. Furthermore, if any profits were earned by MyPlayers, the money was used to compensate the players proportionally.

Collective salary cuts should be considered strictly exceptional but, in these circumstances, it was seen as a necessary measure to overcome the unpredictable and difficult period such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential that such measures are not adopted through negotiations and agreement of athlete associations and not as unilateral decisions of sport organisations. Therefore, it is crucial for the associations to continuously build trustful relationships with the members and be in dialogue with them. Open communication and explanation of the measures adopted and their rationale is essential for their acceptance.

# Communications and media

The members should be kept informed about the work that their player association is doing, so they can see the benefit that the association brings to players as collective and individuals. Well-structured communication is essential way to amplify your message both to the association members and the rest of the world. In the modern digital world, social media play a significant role in communication and are a cost effective option to reach your target audiences.

## Targeted social media channels

There are several target groups for whom the communication channels are built. The most important and relevant group is athletes. However, there are also fans and spectators, partners and sponsors, institutions, etc.

Each target group uses a different source of information, for example to check the news and updates about their favourite sport or club. Therefore, player associations should work on adjusting their social media communication in accordance with the preferences of each target group. Keep in mind that the following recommendations are general, and national or local specificities may apply. Remember that no one knows your audience better than you.

- Instagram: athletes, young fans
- Twitter: athletes, media and corporate bodies, clubs
- LinkedIn: media, institutions, commercial partners
- Facebook: fans over 40 y.o.

WhatsApp and Instagram are one of the most suitable ways to communicate with athletes because both are widely used and allow to get quick responses and reactions.

Videos become a more and more popular format for acquiring new information, especially when it comes to younger generations. For instance, the French handball players' union (AJPH) records tutorial videos of up to three minutes on concrete topics interesting to the athletes and posts them on their Instagram.

Apart from using the player association's social media channels, it is also useful to ask members to mention/tag the association on their own accounts. Collaborating with influential industry media in your sport (e.g., Rouleur in cycling) helps to reach out to more athletes who may still not know about the association. Similarly, appearing on the media of the sport's sponsors and event organisers further expands the recognition and visibility of your association.





# Player development

Player development refers to the holistic development of athletes as individuals by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in life outside of sport. Player development touches upon many different areas not exclusively related to career and education opportunities for athletes but also, for example, mental and physical health, and personal skills development.

Player development is a priority for many of the athlete associations and they aim to facilitate all players with an opportunity to develop themselves beyond sport. A career in sport could be short due to the rapidly changing environment of the sport industry and the risks of unfortunate events like injuries. Therefore, already during their sporting career players should be provided with opportunities to develop themselves for life outside of sport. So that when players have to finish their career in sport for one or another reason, they do not feel lost and incapable. Moreover, engaging in personal development is likely to positively influence the overall wellbeing and performance of players.

## Player development in practice

Player development programs may vary in their scale, meaning that big associations may employ full-time player development managers while smaller associations usually do not have enough resources to do so. However, this does not mean that smaller associations cannot have player development programs. For example, the association of futsal players in Spain (AJFS) cooperates with sports psychologists on a part-time basis as freelancers to deliver their player development programs. AJFS offers two kinds of player development programs:

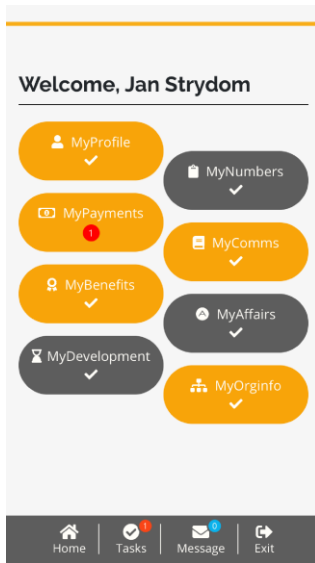
1. Player Development Manager - for professional futsal players under 30 y.o. and former futsal players after 5 years of their retirement. The players are contacting the association if they want to get assistance in player development.
2. Design Your Future - for professional futsal players over 30 y.o. and former futsal players during the first 5 years of their retirement. The association contacts the players to inform them about the player development service.



The range of topics that you want to cover in player development management depends on your members' needs and demands. For instance, Gaelic Players Association (GPA) focuses on four pillars in its updated BEO360 player development program:

- Life Skills (e.g., leadership development, public speech & media training, financial wellbeing)
- Dual career (e.g., setting up your LinkedIn profile, starting your own business)
- Wellbeing (e.g., physical wellbeing, injury prevention, digital wellbeing support platform)
- Transition (e.g., pre-retirement planning, change management support)

## MyPlayers App



Many player associations are considering developing a mobile app for the players but may wonder if this is a worthy investment. MyPlayers is a positive example of launching an app that among other functions has the player development management system linked to the app.

All the data related to player development is saved in the MyPlayers app. For example, consults, group sessions, and documents are accessible through the app. The app also sets reminders for pending tasks, provides direct access to the 24/7 well-being hotline and allows one to apply for a bursary. Apart from the benefits for the players, the MyPlayers app also makes the life of player development managers easier due to the traffic light system which indicates which players may need more attention.

# Commercial operations and marketing

As with any other organisation, a player association has to generate income in order to sustain itself and to realise its mission. The larger the income the more money can be invested in the development of the association and the more benefits can be offered to its members.

## Revenue streams

Player associations typically have diverse revenue streams. It is important to remember that there may be limitations related to associations' revenues and finances due to the legal form and applicable law. Associations may typically generate income through:

- Membership fees
- Partnerships and sponsorships
- Collective image rights
- Funding from a sport federation or governing body
- Developing your own events (e.g., gala dinners)
- Community, charity and fund-raising
- Project-specific funding, for example from Erasmus programme.

The first three streams from the list will be described further.



## Membership fees

Membership fees are a source of income that all of the player associations have. In order to increase the number of memberships and, hence, get more income from membership fees an association could offer discounts for new members who want to join the association at the same time as their teammates, for example, 1+1=1 or 50% off the membership fee for five or more new members.

In addition, an association could think about creating a membership plan not only for athletes. For instance, The Cyclists' Alliance also offers membership for supporters who occasionally or regularly participate in cycling.

## Partnerships and sponsorships

Another source of income comes from partners and sponsors. Sponsors could be the same as your sport's sponsors or your own association's sponsors. To better attract brands to sponsor your association, it is essential to find a good fit between the brand and the association's project. For instance, AJFSF partners with trainers' brands that give discounts on trainers for the members of the player association. As a result, both parties benefit: members get high-quality trainers for a cheaper price, and the brand increases its visibility and acquires loyal customers.



## **Collective image rights**

Collective image rights could become the main source of revenue for player associations, therefore, it is essential to explore this issue in detail in your particular country and sport context. MyPlayers association divides collective image right into two groups (the use of players for appearances and the use of player attributes such as names, images, etc.) and uses them in a group context (three or more players). In an individual context, it is the player and the manager/agent who deal with image rights. A major share of revenues generated from collective image rights is then distributed to the players. The players are paid for broadcasted games, performing appearances from sponsors, and use of player attributes in licensing programs (e.g, video games).

# Conclusion

ProMobility project gathered together professionals in the sport industry from Europe and South Africa to share their expertise on the topics of player recruitment and engagement, response to the COVID-19 pandemic, communications and media, player development, and commercial operations and marketing.

The five topics of the project are in fact closely correlated with each other. To recruit the players successfully, an association should be active in communicating about its activities and benefits for the players. When the association invests in player development, it brings benefits to the players not only as sportspeople but as individuals. When players are satisfied with the association's actions, they are trustful and are likely to help the association in crisis situations. The more members join the association, the more powerful it becomes and, hence, can have a stronger voice to raise, be respected and improve their rights and conditions, also can help to attract bigger sponsors and probably increase their budget. The more income an association has, more services and help can be offered to the players, and players would be interested to join, and the association would grow. Therefore, one positive action in the association often results in a series of positive 'side effects' for the association and its members.

Although athlete and player associations that participated in the project vary in their size, revenue, country and range of services for the members, everyone could find a topic or practice that would be beneficial to learn from. Hopefully, the readers of this booklet will find useful information for their organisations as well.

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