

# HOW TO SET UP A LEADERSHIP COURSE

Practical Guide for Player Associations



**PROLead**  
ERASMUS+ SPORT

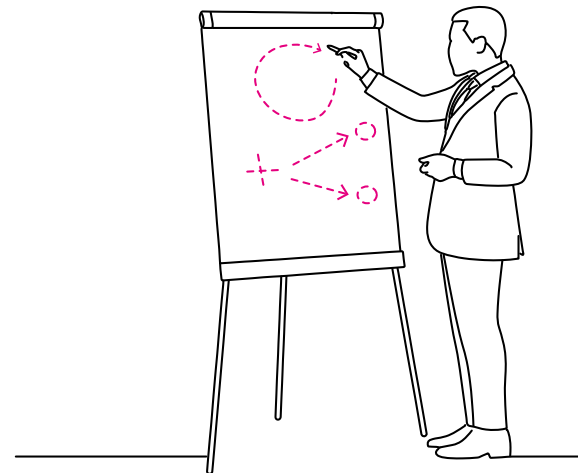


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of the European Union





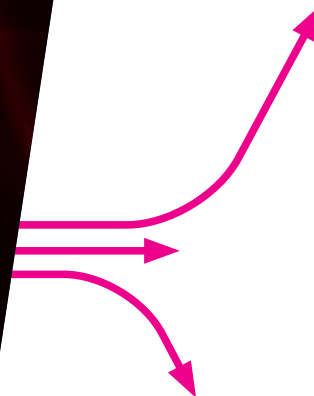
# INTRODUCTION



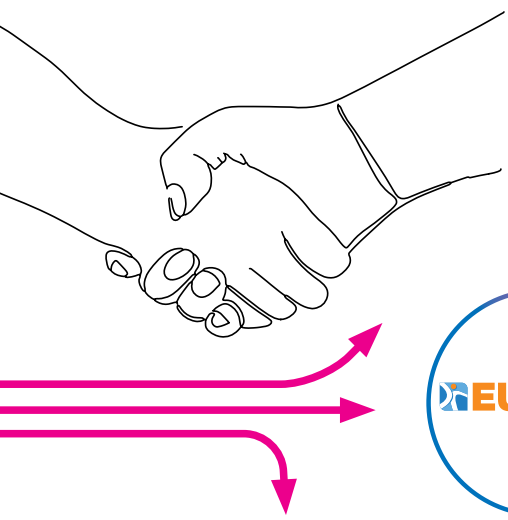
## HOW TO SET UP A LEADERSHIP COURSE

### Practical Guide for Player Associations

**PROLead** is a collaborative partnership project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and coordinated by European Elite Athletes Association (EU Athletes), with German Sport University Cologne and 8 player associations from different countries and sports (GPA, RPI, PPF, FNASS, UBE, TCA, AJFS, AJJV) as partners. Focusing on the topic of dual careers of athletes, the aim of the project was to enhance leadership skills of athletes, as well as volunteers and staff of player associations, by designing and implementing leadership courses at the European and national level.



# PROJECT PARTNERS



## European Elite Athletes Association

**EU Athletes** was set up in 2008 and is the leading European multi-sport federation of player associations with 32 members in 15 different European countries and in a wide range of different sports. More than 25,000 elite athletes are represented through the membership.

[www.euathletes.org/](http://www.euathletes.org/)

## German Sport University Cologne

**GSU** is Germany's only, and Europe's largest, university in the field of sport and exercise science. It is comprised of 20 academic institutes, four affiliated institutes as well as 12 academic centres and research units.

[www.dshs-koeln.de/](http://www.dshs-koeln.de/)

## Gaelic Players Association

**GPA** is the representative body for inter-county hurlers and Gaelic footballers in Ireland. Founded by players in 1999, the GPA supports over 4,000 inter-county players.

[www.gaelicplayers.com/](http://www.gaelicplayers.com/)

## Asociación de Jugadores de Futbol Sala

**AJFS** was established in 1998, Spanish Futsal Players Association represents almost 400 members, included professional players of 1st and 2nd Division, and retired players.

[www.ajfs.es/](http://www.ajfs.es/)

## Rugby Players Ireland

**RPI** was founded in 2001 and is the collective voice for professional rugby players in Ireland, representing around 300 players.

[www.rugbyplayersireland.ie/](http://www.rugbyplayersireland.ie/)



## Asociación de Jugadores y Jugadoras de Voleibol

**AJJV** was established in 2016 and is the player association for professional volleyball players in Spain.

[www.ajjv.es/](http://www.ajjv.es/)

## The Cyclists' Alliance

**TCA** is an independent, international association that represents the competitive, economic, and personal interests of all professional women cyclists, with around 225 women riders as members.

[www.cyclistsalliance.org/](http://www.cyclistsalliance.org/)

## Union des Basketteurs Européens

**UBE** was founded in 1991 and is a federation of Basketball players associations from various European countries representing the national organizations and their members at the international level.

[www.ubeyplayers.com/](http://www.ubeyplayers.com/)

## Fédération Nationale des Associations et Syndicats de Sportifs

**FNASS** is the federation of player associations in France that brings together organisations representing athletes in football, basketball, rugby, handball, cycling, volleyball and individual elite sports.

[www.fnass.fr/](http://www.fnass.fr/)

## Professional Players Federation

**PPF** is a federation of 13 professional player associations and sports trade unions in the United Kingdom covering 17,000 professional athletes in different sports including football, rugby union, cricket, golf, snooker, horse racing, netball and darts.

[www.ppf.org.uk/](http://www.ppf.org.uk/)





# PROJECT TEAM



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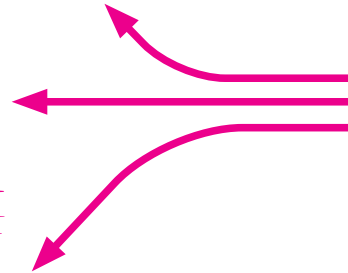
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# WHAT IS LEADERSHIP

## Why leadership programmes in sport?

In its basic and most simple form, leadership is the act of influencing others to follow. It has been widely identified across all different sectors, sport, business or community, that there are many common leadership characteristics. Whether it's on the pitch or in the boardroom, a leader is usually made up of the same qualities.

Some of these common leadership characteristics include:

- > Communication skills
- > Team building/working well as part of a team
- > Accountability
- > Empathy
- > Risk-taking
- > Ability to influence
- > Focus
- > Creativity
- > Drive for results
- > Authenticity
- > Adaptability
- > Courage

Through sport, athletes acquire many leadership skills on the field of play. The idea of facilitating a leadership programme to athletes is to help them identify key skills that they have developed through sport and show them how to use those skills in other areas of their lives as well as in sport.



For more information see [www.thomas.co](http://www.thomas.co)

At times an athlete might not think that the skills they have developed through sport fall under headings like communication skills, drive for results and team building – they can simply just play the game as they have been trained to without overthinking how all the skills come together. The leadership course aims to show the athlete how to identify what skills they already have, and teach them how to use those skills more effectively.

## Leadership In Action

Self-awareness is an essential trait of a great leader. By knowing your values, personality, needs, habits, and emotions, and how they affect your actions and the actions of others, individuals will be better able to manage stress, make better decisions and ultimately lead others to do the same.

As part of Leadership Programme content, organisations may benefit from utilising Personal Profile Analysis (PPA) such as DISC which is delivered by Thomas International. This can provide information on an individual's fears, motivators, values and behavioural style using four main profile factors: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance.



# LEADERSHIP AND DUAL CAREER



## Leadership and Dual Career

Too many elite athletes reach the end of their sporting careers unprepared. Tailored education opportunities and support services facilitating a successful transition into a second career are essential during and after the sporting career.

A framework for Improving Dual Career Support for Players was developed by EU Athletes in 2012. These guiding principles are designed to inspire the formulation and adoption of action-oriented national dual career guidelines and to raise awareness at national level about the concept of player development and dual careers.

Other key areas can include helping players to learn a trade, foreign languages, basic computer skills and even entrepreneurial support.

Teaching leadership works as it is both a direct skill and also a soft return to education and training. This may attract all players and hopefully re-engage them with the benefits of educating themselves so that they can return to the labour market.

By developing and delivering leadership training for athletes we are helping to ensure that their skills on the field are developed for life after sport with a specific tailored course.

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.



# IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMES TO PLAYER ASSOCIATIONS



A key measure of success of a leadership programme is that the athlete has a renewed sense of purpose and enjoyment in their life, feel more fulfilled and are able to make an increased contribution to their life, the game, our communities and our society.

There are significant supplementary benefits of designing and delivering leadership education to members. These can include:

- + Increased engagement with Player Development Programmes
- + Build perspective and resilience among members to manage transition after retirement
- + Greater employability options for members outside of sport
- + Succession planning opportunities and pathways for athletes to become more actively involved in leadership roles within the association
- + Enhanced social and community activism to support causes and campaigns to deliver positive societal change



## Leadership in Action Tom Parsons, GPA

After a career threatening serious knee injury, Tom sought focus through the GPA Jim Madden Leadership Programme to provide support and perspective through his extended period out of the game.

Upon completion of the Leadership Programme, Tom completed a Diploma in Leadership from National University of Ireland.

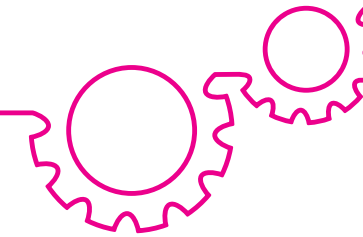
He became more actively involved at leadership level in the GPA becoming Chairman of the Board and was appointed CEO in 2021.

**Tom recently joined the board of EU Athletes in 2022.**



# DESKTOP

# RESEARCH



In the first phase of the project, existing leadership education courses in the wider sports world and non-sport related contexts were reviewed, summarized and evaluated.

In addition, academic literature on leadership with particular focus on education was reviewed, covering both sport- and non-sport-related literature. The results are presented in Desktop Research and Literature Review of Leadership Education for Athletes.

A final sample of 30 leadership programmes delivered across Europe was identified which helped inform the design of content of the leadership courses as part of the PROLead Project. Of these programmes, 19 had a sport background while 11 cases were of general leadership content.

Particular consideration was given to the Jim Madden Leadership Programme which had been designed by the Gaelic Players Association in Ireland.



## Topics recommended for inclusion in the courses are:

- > Personal skills/self-awareness
- > Decision-making/problem-solving
- > Communication skills
- > Inter/intrapersonal Skills/ Human Resource Management
- > Finance
- > Flexibility and adaption to specific situations
- > Leadership styles & behavior (emphasis on transformational leadership style)
- > Goal management
- > Organizational culture

## Pedagogical recommendations include the following:

- > Create a positive learning environment
- > Provide feedback
- > Mentoring, coaching and action learning as ways of teaching
- > Provide networking opportunities
- > Student-centred learning (e.g. reflection of activities, application in meetings, meaningful discussions)
- > Realistic examples/cases: linking (job) tasks with content learned





# JIM MADDEN GPA

# LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

**The Jim Madden GPA Leadership Programme** was founded by the GPA in 2015 and has seen over 200 graduates since its inception. This is a yearlong bespoke leadership programme which has been tailored to meet the demands and busy schedules of intercounty GAA athletes in Ireland.



The Programme itself focuses on the following areas which are outlined below:

### **A Series of Leadership Masterclasses**

these masterclasses focuses on leadership panel discussions with leaders from areas of sport, business and community work. Giving the participant a chance to compare and contrast different leadership styles in various areas.

### **Development Centre Workshops**

It is designed to assess the participants' own strengths and leadership style and to provide constructive objective feedback and guidance on the participants leadership developmental areas.

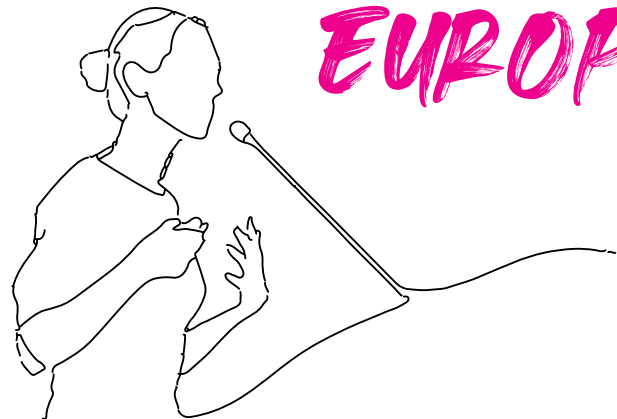
### **Personal Leadership Workshops, Interpersonal Leadership Workshop and Group Leadership Workshops**

The workshops are designed to focus on how lead themselves, how they lead when dealing with another person one on one and as a leader and to highlight positive ways of leading a group. Additionally, the workshops show examples of different leadership styles available for these situations.

### **Optional Community Project**

Participants are given the opportunity to create and engage in a project which gives back to their local community





# EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP

The second phase of the PROLead project was embodied by the European Leadership Course. The course was delivered virtually over three sessions in January, March and May 2021.

The course, which was open to player associations staff and volunteers, was developed based on the academic research and literature review of leadership education for athletes, partners' input, and following the example of Gaelic Players Association's Jim Madden GPA Leadership programme. Each session was facilitated by leadership experts from the world of sport and business.



## Session Modules

- | Session | Modules  |
|---------|--|
| 1       | 1.1 Personal Skills and Self Awareness                                 |
|         | 1.2 Leadership Behaviours and Styles                                   |
|         | 1.3 Leadership in Action Panel Discussion                              |
|         | 1.4 Trust and Engagement, Intro to Problem Solving and Decision Making |
| 2       | 2.1 Communication Skills   |
|         | 2.2 Inter/Intrapersonal Skills/HRM                                     |
|         | 2.3 Organisational Culture   |
|         | 2.4 Leadership in Action Panel Discussion                              |
| 3       | 3.1 Flexibility and Adaptability                                       |
|         | 3.2 Crisis and Change Management                                       |
|         | 3.3 Design and Delivery of a Leadership Programme                      |
|         | 3.4 Graduation   |

# COURSE



## SPEAKERS FROM THE EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP COURSE



**Martin Kelly**

Think HR

Leadership Behaviours and Styles

Trust and Engagement, Intro to Problem Solving and Decision Making,

Design and Delivery of a Leadership Programme

www.linkedin.com/in/martin-kelly-37a65413/



**Daire Lynam**

Thomas International

Personal Skills & Self Awareness

www.linkedin.com/in/martin-kelly-37a65413/



**Declan O'Connell**

Declan O'Connell

Flexibility and Adaptability

Crisis and Change Management

www.linkedin.com/in/oconnelldeclan/



**Maarten Van Heeswijk**

Maar Hees Coaching and Consultancy

Communication Skills Inter/Intrapersonal Skills/HRM

www.linkedin.com/in/maartenvanheeswijk/



**Joyce Van Kooten**

JoynYou

Organisational Culture

Leadership in Action Panel Discussion

www.linkedin.com/in/joyce-van-kooten-3714914/

# NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COURSES






As part of the third and final phase of the PROLead Project, partner associations were required to design and deliver their own National Leadership Course to athlete members of their organisation.

The National Leadership Courses consolidated the learning from the European Leadership Course which was delivered to project partners as part of phase 1 of the PROLead Project.

Each of the National Leadership Courses were adapted to suit the environment, language, culture and requirements of each individual partner association.

In some instances, project partners in the same country could partner to deliver their own National Leadership Course to athletes from both organisations.

The details of five National Leadership Courses that were delivered throughout 2022 can be found under the links below.

Organisation	Intellectual output
 RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND	<a href="http://www.rugbyplayersireland.ie/venture-leadership/">www.rugbyplayersireland.ie/venture-leadership/</a>
 The Cyclists' Alliance	<a href="http://www.cyclistsalliance.org/2022/11/tca-prolead-leadership-course/">www.cyclistsalliance.org/2022/11/tca-prolead-leadership-course/</a>
 UBE	<a href="http://www.ubeyplayers.com/news/pro-lead-intellectual-output-la-leadership-del-futuro/">www.ubeyplayers.com/news/pro-lead-intellectual-output-la-leadership-del-futuro/</a>
 AJJV	<a href="http://www.ajjv.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Curso-Liderazgo-PROLead-Espana_2022_VF.pdf">www.ajjv.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Curso-Liderazgo-PROLead-Espana_2022_VF.pdf</a>
 AJFS ASOCIACIÓN JUGADORES DE FUTBOL SALA	<a href="http://www.ajfs.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Curso-Liderazgo-PROLead-Espana_2022_VF.pdf">www.ajfs.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Curso-Liderazgo-PROLead-Espana_2022_VF.pdf</a>

## EVALUATION



The leadership courses should be evaluated including participants' feedback. This feedback can serve as a basis to further develop and improve the course. Following the approach of the PROLead project, it is suggested that the evaluation covers two major aspects: the course as a whole and individual lectures of the course.

The evaluation of the **course** should address the following aspects (all rated on 5-point rating scales):

- > Overall structure of the course content
- > Overall administration and logistical elements of the course
- > Provision of information about course details (schedule, requirements for successful completion etc.)
- > Perceived usefulness of the course for the participants' professional career
- > Perceived ability of the course to improve the participants' understanding of leadership
- > Availability of supporting staff
- > Course's motivational potential to carry on this pathway of developing the participants' leadership skills

In addition, for face-to-face courses, the following aspects should be included:

- > Classroom (size, furnishings etc.)
- > Catering

Further, the following open-ended questions are useful for evaluating the course:

- > What did you like about the course and why?
- > Is there anything you didn't like/areas for improvement?
- > Please mark the modules you felt were most beneficial.

The evaluation of **individual modules** should address the following aspects (all rated on 5-point rating scales):

- > Overall rating of speaker
- > Methods and style of teaching
- > Quality of the content
- > Speaker's perceived expertise
- > Speaker's reactions to and discussion of questions from the audience

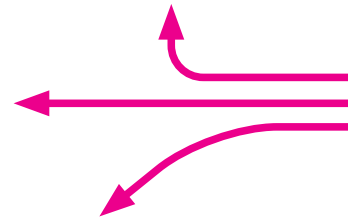
The following two open-ended questions provide additional insight into participants' opinions about the respective lectures:

- > What did you like about "speaker's" lecture and why?
- > Is there anything you didn't like/areas for improvement?

It is advisable to feed the evaluation content into an online survey tool and provide a link to the course participants at the end of each session (evaluation of individual lectures) and the end of the course (course evaluation). Participants should be given some time to complete the survey in order to increase the response rate.

# NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

# COURSE DEVELOPMENT



Consideration of what specific modules to deliver as part of a leadership course can be particularly challenging given the depth of content available on the subject. Determination of final content may be dependent on certain logistical variables such as time available, budget, geography, language or availability of facilitators.

One important principle for organisations to consider is the contextual relationship between the leadership content and your members. Organisations should aspire to ensure the content delivered is relevant, interesting and appropriate to the specific audience.

When designing a leadership course, organisations should therefore, agree guiding principles by which final content, speakers and delivery method should abide by.

## Some potential principles may include :

- Method of delivery – virtual, face to face or a blended learning model
- How you challenge participants – personal, professional and community level within and beyond sport
- Engaging Participants – maintaining engagement through interactive and challenging learning experience
- Integrated – design of the programme should see each theme/module following the other
- Practical – encourage participants to apply the tools, frameworks and skills developed in the programme to real life situations and challenges



## Course Timeline Example (in person)

- 1 The first phase of the project should be the selection of the leadership topics which you would like to focus the programme on
- 2 The second phase should be the recruitment phase and encouraging target athlete groups to take part in the programme.
- 3 The third phase should focus on confirming the dates and locations for each of the sessions. The dates and times of the workshops should be scheduled to accommodate the athletes' schedules and the competition calendar. At this phase you should also confirm your speakers for each of the sessions
- 4 The fourth phase should include a welcome meeting online for the participants where you can introduce the programme and outline how the programme will run while reconfirming the face-to-face sessions dates.
- 5 The fifth phase should consist on running each of the face-to-face sessions
- 6 The sixth phase should focus on the participants presenting their personal learning of the course with an online presentation
- 7 The last phase of the programme should be the graduation which can take place face to face or online where the participants will receive certificates for completing the course

## Recruitment

Identifying suitable candidates to participate in the course is an important aspect to the success of its delivery. It is advisable that player associations develop a robust process for candidate selection consisting of a phased approach from promotion and marketing, application process and selection based on preestablished criteria. Suitability of the candidates may be determined based on engagement with the association to date, availability, leadership experience, motivation and where the programme may sit within the context of their overall personal development plan.

Selection of leadership topics for programme	October
Recruitment of participants	November
Confirm date for workshops	December
Programme Kickoff meeting (online)	January
Workshop 1 (face to face)	March
Workshop 2 (face to face)	May
Workshop 3 (face to face)	July
Group presentations and feedback (online)	August
Graduation (online / face to face)	September

# EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COURSES

## Accommodating Player's Busy Schedules

RPI decided to run the sessions virtually and in the evenings, with two modules delivered in-person due to their practical nature. For the next course they are looking to condense the modules into a weekend, with the in-person event scheduled pre-season when the majority of players are not required to travel a lot.

To successfully deliver the course in person, UBE focused on the best day to deliver the lessons. Since games are generally scheduled on Sundays, the sessions took place only on Mondays, with the last session finishing in the late afternoon to allow participants to go back to their cities at night and be comfortable for the next day's practices.

## Choosing the Speakers

AJFS and AJJV used their networks to include high-profile former futsal and volleyball players as speakers to share their personal experiences, and increase participants' engagement.

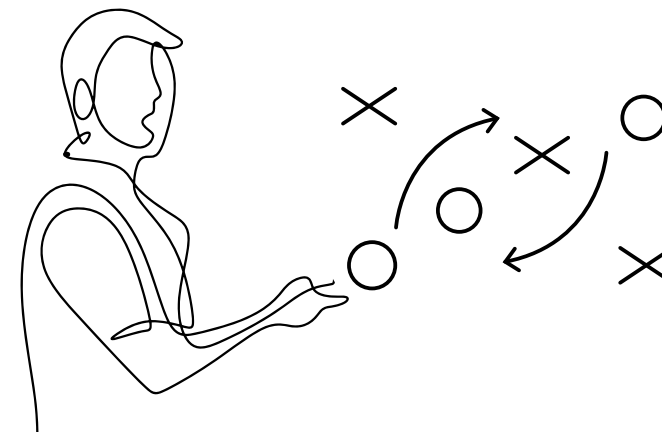
## Looking for Partners

In the next edition of the course, TCA plans to involve industry partners to make job placement opportunities available for participants and support dual careers of athletes involved.

Thanks to the existing partnership with an education institution, AJFS was able to include them in the National Leadership Course, which made the delivery of the course easier and ensured its quality.

## Getting Feedback

Considering the importance of the ongoing evaluation, TCA, AJFS and AJJV all made sure to share the evaluation questionnaires before the end of the session and made completing those a requirement for graduation from the course.



## Promoting the Course

UBE decided to prepare a clear and informative flyer that was shared by communicators and social media to reach target players.

RPI used its network of Player Development Managers to further promote and inform potential participants to the course after a flyer detailing modules, speakers and dates was sent to all members.

## Choosing the Participants

TCA required the candidates to explain their motivation and how the course would help them achieve their future goals while applying.

To ensure high engagement, RPI and UBE had in person meetings with each candidate during which motivation as well as time commitment required was discussed.

## Motivating Self-Work

RPI created a simple reflection diary that the participants were encouraged to complete after each module. There was also an opportunity for the participants to meet with their PDM to reflect on the modules and the application of the knowledge and skills.

## Providing Resources

RPI prepared a handbook for participants containing a breakdown of modules, speakers' profiles, links to online sessions, the reflection page as well as pre-reading and additional materials that was distributed ahead of the course.

During the course delivered by UBE, each of the speakers and experts was asked to suggest reading materials.

# CONCLUSION

The development of leadership programmes and delivery can have many benefits for both participants and players associations.

The transferability of leadership capabilities from the athletic environment to the workplace can not only support the development of dual career but also help prepare athletes with their transition from sport.

Athletes who benefit from leadership development are

more likely to build a greater sense of self-awareness and perspective to strengthen their position as role models in their communities as well as applying their skills to wider society.

Developing more actively engaged and self-motivated membership can have a profoundly positive impact from a wider organisation perspective in providing greater pathways for leadership roles within players associations.



 **EUAthletes**

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 [@EUAthletes](https://twitter.com/EUAthletes)