

# *Dual Career Athletes and Sustainable Development: A Model for the Future of Sport*

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## *Abstract*

Dual career athletes play a crucial role in the sustainable development of sports and society. Balancing education, professional training, and athletic commitments fosters long-term career stability while enhancing social and economic inclusion. Effective dual career policies mitigate financial and psychological risks, equipping athletes with essential skills for post-sport careers. Investing in structured dual career frameworks benefits both individuals and the broader sports ecosystem, ensuring long-term viability and resilience. Collaboration among stakeholders is key to promoting sustainability and inclusion in sports through dual career opportunities.

*Keywords:* Sustainable Development; Athlete Transition; Economic Sustainability; Social Inclusion; Education and Sport; Career Opportunities.

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## **Introduction**

In recent decades, the concept of dual careers for athletes has gained increasing relevance in the international sports landscape. Traditionally, high-level athletes have faced the dilemma of choosing between pursuing a competitive career and obtaining academic or professional training. However, economic, social, and cultural transformations have pushed toward a more sustainable model, enabling athletes to reconcile their sports careers with parallel educational and professional development (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). This strategy not only ensures a more secure future for athletes after retirement from competition but also contributes to creating a

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more balanced sports system aligned with sustainability principles (European Commission, 2012).

The concept of sustainable development, officially introduced by the Brundtland Report in 1987, is based on the idea of meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (Brundtland, 1987). In the sports sector, this principle translates into a model that considers not only environmental sustainability but also economic and social sustainability. In this perspective, the dual career emerges as a key strategy for ensuring the longevity of athletes' careers and reducing inequalities and vulnerabilities associated with the end of competitive activity (Aquilina, 2013).

The dual career refers to the ability of athletes to combine their sports commitment with an academic or professional path without having to completely sacrifice one of the two spheres. The European Union, through its 2012 Recommendation on the dual career of athletes, emphasized the importance of policies and programs aimed at supporting athletes in this challenge (European Commission, 2012). Educational institutions, sports organizations, and the labor market must collaborate to create favorable environments that allow athletes to develop transversal skills and prepare for a sustainable future (Henry, 2013).

The benefits of a dual career are manifold: economic security, as many athletes struggle to maintain an adequate standard of living after retirement, especially in disciplines with fewer earning opportunities; psychological well-being, as the awareness of having professional alternatives reduces the anxiety associated with post-career uncertainty; and societal contribution, as dual-career athletes can become ambassadors of positive values, such as resilience, time management, and discipline, contributing to a more balanced and sustainable society (Johansson & Lundqvist, 2024).

One of the crucial aspects of sustainable development in sports concerns its economic sustainability. Sports careers are often short-lived, making long-term economic planning essential. A dual career allows athletes to avoid exclusive dependence on income from sports and invest in their professional growth. Many dual career support programs include scholarships, academic tutoring, and flexible educational pathways to enable athletes to balance study and training (Frontini & Zibin, 2025). Universities and educational institutions are implementing personalized learning models, online courses, and tailored programs for professional athletes. These tools ensure that education is not an obstacle to a sports career but an added value. Furthermore, economic sustainability also extends to sports federations and clubs, which can benefit from athletes better prepared for managerial or leadership roles within the sports sector. Former athletes trained in sports

economics, management, or communication can contribute to the growth and professionalization of the entire sector, making it more resilient and innovative (Henry, 2013).

The dual career also represents an important tool for social sustainability, as it promotes inclusion and equal opportunities for all athletes, regardless of gender, sports discipline, or socio-economic conditions. Gender equality is a key element: historically, many female athletes have had fewer opportunities to earn high salaries than their male counterparts. The possibility of pursuing parallel education increases female athletes' economic autonomy and helps reduce the gender gap in sports. Additionally, the dual career is particularly relevant for athletes competing in less commercialized disciplines with fewer financial resources. Through support programs, these athletes can build an alternative career without prematurely abandoning sports. Athletes with an academic background can have a significant impact on society, both as mentors for younger generations and as promoters of ethical and sustainable values (Johansson & Lundqvist, 2024).

Although the link between a dual career and environmental sustainability may seem less immediate, there are several points of connection. Athletes who receive advanced education are more likely to develop awareness of environmental issues and promote sustainable sports practices. For example, athletes with training in environmental sciences, circular economy, or sustainable engineering can contribute to innovations in the sports world, such as designing eco-friendly equipment, managing sports facilities efficiently, or reducing the environmental impact of sporting events. Moreover, high-level athletes are often public figures with strong media influence. If educated on environmental issues, they can become ambassadors of sustainable practices, raising public awareness on topics such as carbon footprint reduction, recycling, and responsible resource use (Frontini & Zibin, 2025).

The dual career is not just an opportunity for athletes but a true model of sustainable development for sports and society. It ensures a more secure future for athletes, reduces social inequalities, promotes more responsible economic management, and contributes to the growth of environmental awareness within the sports world. For this model to be effectively implemented, a joint commitment from sports institutions, academia, and governments is necessary. Flexible education programs, economic incentives, and a culture that values athletes' dual paths are fundamental elements to creating a fairer, more resilient, and sustainable sports ecosystem. In an era where sustainability has become a global priority, the dual career represents a concrete pathway to ensuring that sports are not just

a source of entertainment but also a driver of social, economic, and environmental progress.

### **Economic Sustainability: Ensuring Financial Stability for Athlete**

Economic sustainability in sports is a critical factor influencing the long-term financial well-being of athletes. Unlike many other professions that allow for a prolonged career with steady income growth, most athletes face relatively short careers, unpredictable earnings, and financial instability after retirement. Ensuring economic sustainability for athletes involves financial literacy, diversified career pathways, responsible sponsorship agreements, and governance policies that protect their financial interests (Andrews & Harrington, 2020). For dual career athletes – those who balance both sports and education or work – economic sustainability is even more complex, requiring structured support systems and policies that facilitate the coexistence of athletic and professional development (Aquilina, 2013).

One of the biggest challenges athletes face is the short duration of their professional careers. Research by Stambulova and Wylleman (2019) indicates that elite athletes often retire by their mid-30s, leaving them with several decades of life to manage financially without competitive sports income. For dual career athletes, the early development of a parallel professional career can provide long-term financial security and reduce dependence on sports income alone. The European Commission (2012) has issued guidelines advocating for structured dual-career programs, emphasizing their importance in preparing athletes for life beyond sports and ensuring economic resilience.

Financial literacy is another crucial component of economic sustainability, particularly for dual career athletes who must navigate both their sports-related earnings and their secondary professional income. Many athletes lack the necessary education on budgeting, investments, and wealth management, which can lead to poor financial decisions and even bankruptcy. According to Henriksen, Storm, and Ryom (2021), implementing financial literacy programs within sports organizations and educational institutions can significantly enhance athletes' ability to manage their earnings effectively. These programs should cover topics such as smart investing, retirement planning, and risk assessment to ensure long-term financial stability (Miller & Martin, 2022).

Dual career athletes must also strategically manage their sponsorship agreements and contractual earnings. High-profile athletes often secure lucrative endorsement deals, yet many fail to negotiate long-term financial

benefits. A study by Kellison and Hong (2022) suggests that athletes should work with financial advisors to secure contracts that provide stable financial returns beyond their active years. Moreover, sponsorship agreements should encourage responsible financial planning, helping athletes avoid reckless spending and invest in long-term assets (Smith, 2021). Dual career athletes have an advantage in that they can use their secondary careers as leverage in negotiations, ensuring financial stability beyond their sports tenure.

Governance bodies and sports organizations bear a critical responsibility in ensuring economic sustainability for dual career athletes. Policies such as flexible education programs, financial assistance for continued education, pension schemes, retirement funds, and post-career support programs can provide financial security. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and national sports federations have initiated programs aimed at assisting athletes in their career transitions, but these initiatives must be expanded to cater to dual career athletes, who may require tailored support that acknowledges their dual commitments (IOC, 2020).

Investing in diversified financial opportunities is another way for dual career athletes to achieve economic sustainability. Given the irregular income structure of sports careers, investing in financial portfolios, real estate, or business ventures can provide a stable financial foundation. Financial institutions and advisory services should develop specialized investment plans tailored to the unique income structures of dual career athletes, ensuring passive income even after retirement (Thompson & Rogers, 2023). By leveraging their secondary careers, these athletes can build a financial cushion that sustains them beyond the duration of their sports careers.

Athletes who successfully transition into sustainable careers post-retirement serve as role models for financial responsibility. Many former athletes have leveraged their brands to become entrepreneurs, coaches, or commentators, demonstrating how to secure financial stability beyond their playing years. Mentorship programs where retired dual career athletes guide younger athletes on financial management and career planning can be instrumental in fostering economic sustainability within the sports community (Williams & Carter, 2021). Such programs not only help athletes plan for the future but also create a network of financially stable former athletes who contribute to society beyond their athletic achievements.

The integration of economic sustainability principles into sports governance requires collaboration between sports federations, governments, financial institutions, and educational bodies. Policies that mandate financial education, career transition support, and responsible sponsorship agreements can help build a financially resilient athletic community. Encouraging

research on athlete financial behavior and sustainable economic models is essential for developing innovative strategies that cater to the evolving landscape of professional sports (Brown, 2022). Dual career athletes, in particular, require policies that facilitate career flexibility, allowing them to make the most of both their sports careers and their professional endeavors.

In summary, economic sustainability is fundamental to an athlete's long-term financial security and overall well-being. For dual career athletes, balancing sports with education or employment can serve as a crucial financial safety net, reducing reliance on sports income and ensuring stability beyond retirement. By prioritizing financial literacy, career diversification, structured support systems, and responsible financial planning, athletes can mitigate the risks associated with short-term sports careers and build a sustainable financial future. Sports organizations and policymakers must recognize their role in fostering economic sustainability and implement strategies that empower athletes to secure their financial stability beyond their competitive years. Addressing these challenges through education, governance, and strategic planning will benefit not only individual athletes but also contribute to the broader economic sustainability of the sports industry.

### **Social Sustainability: Inclusion, Equality, and Career Opportunities**

Social sustainability in sports is an essential pillar for ensuring long-term well-being, equity, and opportunities for athletes, particularly those pursuing dual careers. The dual career model, which allows athletes to balance sports participation with education or professional development, is increasingly recognized as a mechanism for promoting inclusion, equal opportunities, and long-term career security (Aquilina & Henry, 2013). By fostering a socially sustainable environment, sports organizations, educational institutions, and policymakers can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable system that supports athletes throughout and beyond their competitive careers. One of the primary concerns in social sustainability for dual career athletes is ensuring accessibility and inclusion for all athletes, regardless of gender, socioeconomic background, or disability status. Research has shown that athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds face significant barriers in accessing education and career opportunities while competing at elite levels (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). Social sustainability strategies should aim to remove these barriers by providing scholarships, mentorship programs, and flexible educational pathways. For female athletes, balancing a dual career often presents unique challenges, including gender biases in sports and

workplace inequalities. According to Henry (2020), women in sports experience higher dropout rates due to limited professional opportunities and societal expectations. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policies, such as equal funding for male and female sports, maternity protections, and career transition programs that accommodate family responsibilities (European Commission, 2016). Similarly, athletes with disabilities face systemic barriers in accessing dual career opportunities. Inclusive educational and vocational programs are essential to ensuring that para-athletes have equitable access to career pathways beyond sports (Farì et al., 2023). Adaptive learning environments, employer incentives for hiring para-athletes, and mentorship initiatives can facilitate the transition from sports to professional careers (De Bosscher et al., 2021). Ensuring equality in the support structures available to dual career athletes is crucial for promoting social sustainability. Athletes from different socioeconomic backgrounds, sports disciplines, and regions often experience disparities in access to financial resources, training facilities, and educational support (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Addressing these inequalities requires collaborative efforts from sports organizations, governments, and academic institutions. For instance, elite athletes in high-revenue sports such as soccer and basketball often receive more financial and structural support compared to those in less commercialized sports. This creates a gap in the ability of athletes to pursue dual careers successfully (Guidotti et al., 2015). Policymakers must ensure that funding mechanisms are equitably distributed across different sports and athlete groups to provide equal opportunities for career development. Additionally, access to dual career programs should not be limited to athletes in developed nations. Many athletes from low- and middle-income countries lack the institutional support needed to pursue education alongside their sports careers. International collaboration between sports federations and universities can facilitate exchange programs, remote learning options, and international mentorship networks to bridge this gap (Ryba et al., 2017). A fundamental aspect of social sustainability is ensuring that athletes can transition smoothly from sports into meaningful careers. Many athletes struggle with post-retirement identity crises, financial instability, and difficulty integrating into the job market due to a lack of professional experience outside of sports (Torregrossa et al., 2020). Dual career programs that integrate career counseling, internships, and academic qualifications play a vital role in preventing these challenges. One effective strategy is the development of partnerships between sports organizations and businesses to provide athletes with tailored career pathways. For example, initiatives such as the IOC's Athlete365 Career+ program offer career transition support, networking opportunities, and job placements for retiring

athletes (International Olympic Committee, 2021). Expanding such programs to a broader range of sports and geographical regions can enhance their impact. Entrepreneurship is another viable career pathway for dual career athletes. Many athletes develop leadership, teamwork, and resilience skills through sports, which are valuable in business ventures. Governments and financial institutions can support athlete entrepreneurs by offering specialized training, startup grants, and networking platforms to facilitate their transition into business (Kelly & Hickey, 2018). To ensure that dual career athletes benefit from a socially sustainable system, policymakers must adopt holistic and inclusive approaches. The following policy recommendations can enhance social sustainability in dual career pathways: Flexible Education Models – Universities and vocational institutions should implement tailored academic programs that accommodate the demanding schedules of athletes, including online learning, part-time courses, and mentorship programs. Workplace Inclusion Policies – Employers should be encouraged to create flexible work arrangements, mentorship initiatives, and career development programs specifically for athletes transitioning from sports to professional careers. Equitable Funding Allocation – Sports governing bodies must ensure that financial and structural support is equitably distributed across all athletes, regardless of gender, sport type, or socioeconomic background. Career Transition Support – Governments and sports organizations should establish structured career transition programs that provide financial counseling, networking opportunities, and employment assistance for retiring athletes. International Collaboration – Cross-border partnerships between educational institutions, businesses, and sports federations can create exchange programs and career development initiatives that benefit athletes from diverse backgrounds. Social sustainability in dual career pathways is essential for fostering inclusion, equality, and long-term career opportunities for athletes. By implementing equitable support structures, removing barriers to education and employment, and fostering career development initiatives, stakeholders in sports, education, and policy can ensure that athletes have sustainable career trajectories beyond their competitive years. A socially sustainable dual career model benefits not only individual athletes but also contributes to broader societal goals of inclusion, workforce diversity, and economic stability.

## **Environmental Sustainability: Athletes as Agents of Change**

Environmental sustainability has become a crucial aspect of global policy



discussions, and the role of athletes, particularly dual career athletes, in promoting sustainable practices is gaining increasing attention. Dual career athletes, who balance both sports and education or professional careers, possess unique platforms to influence and advocate for environmental sustainability. As role models with extensive social reach, these athletes have the potential to educate the public, engage in sustainable initiatives, and promote eco-friendly behaviors within and beyond the sports industry. Their dual expertise in both athletic and professional or academic fields makes them well-positioned to act as agents of change, integrating sustainable practices into sports and society as a whole (McCullough & Kellison, 2020).

One of the most significant ways in which dual career athletes contribute to environmental sustainability is through their advocacy and influence on public awareness. Athletes often have large followings on social media and in public engagements, allowing them to reach diverse audiences and promote eco-friendly behaviors. Their engagement in sustainability campaigns, such as reducing plastic waste, promoting renewable energy, and supporting climate action initiatives, enhances the visibility and credibility of environmental movements (Trendafilova et al., 2021). Many athletes have actively endorsed sustainable brands, collaborated with environmental organizations, and participated in educational programs to spread awareness. This engagement is particularly impactful when athletes draw connections between sustainability and their own sports, highlighting how climate change and environmental degradation directly affect training conditions, competitions, and overall athlete well-being.

The dual career framework equips athletes with academic and professional expertise, allowing them to integrate sustainability into various sectors beyond sports. Many dual career athletes pursue studies or careers in fields such as environmental science, business, and public policy, where they can implement sustainability strategies within their professional domains. Research by Casper et al. (2022) indicates that athletes engaged in dual careers often leverage their education to develop sustainable sports practices, such as eco-friendly event management, sustainable facility designs, and responsible waste management. Their interdisciplinary knowledge enables them to bridge the gap between sports organizations and environmental policy-making, advocating for sustainable regulations within sports federations and beyond.

Sports organizations and governing bodies are increasingly recognizing the need to incorporate sustainability into their operations, and dual career athletes play a crucial role in driving these changes. Sustainable event management, which includes minimizing carbon footprints, reducing waste, and promoting green transportation options, is a growing area where athletes

can exert influence (Dingle & Mallen, 2020). Athletes involved in dual careers often take on leadership roles within their respective organizations, pushing for sustainable policies such as the use of recycled materials for uniforms, energy-efficient stadiums, and climate-neutral competitions. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other major sports governing bodies have launched sustainability programs that encourage athletes to participate in green initiatives, demonstrating the importance of athlete-led environmental advocacy (IOC, 2021).

One of the pressing environmental issues within sports is the impact of travel-related carbon emissions. International competitions require extensive travel, contributing to significant greenhouse gas emissions. Dual career athletes, particularly those with a background in environmental sciences or business, have been instrumental in advocating for sustainable travel policies. This includes supporting carbon offset programs, promoting regional competitions to reduce long-haul flights, and encouraging the use of high-speed rail or electric transportation when possible (Pope et al., 2022). By leveraging their platforms and expertise, these athletes contribute to reshaping the way sports organizations address climate impact, promoting policies that align with broader environmental goals.

Sustainable practices within sports training and facilities are another area where dual career athletes act as catalysts for change. Many athletes have championed initiatives such as solar-powered training centers, water conservation measures in sports complexes, and eco-friendly equipment manufacturing. For instance, innovations in biodegradable sportswear and recycled materials in sports infrastructure are being driven, in part, by athletes who advocate for greener alternatives (Murray & Dwyer, 2021). As both competitors and professionals, dual career athletes bring firsthand insight into how sustainable practices can be seamlessly integrated into the daily operations of training environments.

The intersection between sustainability and athlete well-being is another critical consideration. Climate change has direct implications for sports performance, as rising temperatures, extreme weather conditions, and environmental pollution can negatively affect training and competition conditions. Studies have shown that athletes exposed to high levels of air pollution experience reduced respiratory efficiency, increased risk of heat-related illnesses, and overall decreased performance levels (Orr & Inoue, 2020). As a result, many dual career athletes are advocating for policies that address environmental concerns in sports, such as improved air quality monitoring, climate adaptation strategies for outdoor sports, and sustainable hydration practices. Their unique position as both athletes and professionals enables them to engage in policy discussions, collaborate with environmental

researchers, and influence decision-making processes that prioritize both ecological and athlete health concerns (Raiola et al., 2015).

Educational institutions and sports academies are essential stakeholders in fostering environmental awareness among dual career athletes. Many universities and training centers have incorporated sustainability modules into their sports management and athlete development programs, providing athletes with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for and implement sustainable practices (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2021). By equipping dual career athletes with education on climate change, ecological conservation, and sustainable business strategies, these institutions play a fundamental role in shaping the next generation of environmentally conscious athletes.

Corporate sponsorships also present opportunities for promoting sustainability through athlete engagement. Many companies that sponsor athletes are increasingly aligning their branding with environmental responsibility. Athletes who pursue dual careers in business or marketing can work with corporate sponsors to promote sustainable products, develop green business models, and support environmental initiatives (Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, 2021). Sustainable sponsorship agreements can include commitments to reducing environmental impact, such as using eco-friendly materials in merchandise, offsetting carbon emissions from promotional events, and ensuring ethical supply chain practices. As brand ambassadors, athletes have significant influence over consumer behavior, making them valuable advocates for corporate sustainability efforts.

Community engagement is another crucial aspect of environmental sustainability where dual career athletes play an active role. Many athletes participate in grassroots initiatives, such as tree-planting campaigns, sustainable sports programs for youth, and environmental clean-up events. These efforts not only contribute directly to ecological conservation but also inspire younger generations to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives (Fari et al., 2021; Mallen et al., 2022). By leveraging their public visibility and professional expertise, dual career athletes foster a culture of sustainability that extends beyond the sports industry into broader societal frameworks.

In conclusion, dual career athletes are uniquely positioned to serve as agents of change in the movement toward environmental sustainability. Their ability to balance sports with education and professional careers enables them to integrate sustainability principles into multiple sectors, including sports management, policy-making, corporate sponsorships, and community engagement. By advocating for eco-friendly practices, promoting sustainable event management, and influencing policy reforms, these athletes contribute to the long-term viability of both sports and the

environment. Moving forward, fostering sustainability education and creating opportunities for athlete-led environmental initiatives will be key to ensuring that sports continue to play a constructive role in addressing global environmental challenges.

## **Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Dual Career Policies**

The implementation of dual career policies presents both significant challenges and opportunities in the evolving landscape of modern sports and professional development. Dual career policies aim to support athletes in balancing their sporting commitments with education or vocational training, ensuring long-term career sustainability. While these policies have been widely recognized as essential for athlete welfare, their practical implementation varies across nations, sports disciplines, and educational systems, creating disparities in access and effectiveness (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Understanding the key obstacles and potential benefits of dual career policies is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies that address the needs of athletes while fostering sustainable career transitions.

One of the primary challenges in implementing dual career policies is the structural and logistical constraints that athletes face. High-performance sports demand intensive training schedules, frequent travel for competitions, and psychological pressure, which often clash with academic or professional commitments. Many athletes struggle to find educational institutions or employers that offer the necessary flexibility to accommodate their sports careers. According to Capranica and Guidotti (2021), only a limited number of universities and training centers have structured programs that cater specifically to elite athletes, leading to disparities in dual career opportunities. The lack of tailored academic schedules, remote learning options, and athlete-friendly employment policies restricts many athletes from effectively managing their dual career aspirations.

Financial concerns also play a significant role in shaping dual career policies. Pursuing both an athletic and a professional career often requires additional financial resources, which may not be readily available to all athletes. Many emerging athletes face economic insecurity, as sports scholarships, sponsorship deals, and funding opportunities are not always sufficient to cover both education and training expenses. National policies vary widely in terms of financial support for dual career athletes, with some governments and sports organizations providing grants and scholarships, while others lack structured financial aid programs. Research by Henry

(2020) highlights that financial burdens often force athletes to prioritize short-term athletic success over long-term career planning, which can lead to post-retirement economic instability.

Cultural and institutional differences further complicate the successful implementation of dual career policies. In some countries, there is strong institutional support for combining sports and education, with government policies ensuring structured pathways for dual career athletes. However, in other regions, traditional education systems remain rigid, failing to accommodate the needs of athletes. The level of support provided by sports federations, educational institutions, and employers also varies, influencing the overall effectiveness of dual career policies. Research by De Bosscher et al. (2022) emphasizes the importance of fostering a dual career culture that values both academic and athletic success, reducing stigmatization of athletes who choose to pursue education alongside their sports careers.

Despite these challenges, implementing dual career policies offers numerous opportunities for athletes, educational institutions, and sports organizations. One of the primary benefits is the enhancement of athlete well-being and long-term career security. Athletes who pursue dual careers are better equipped to transition into post-sport professions, reducing the risk of unemployment and psychological distress after retirement. Studies by Aquilina (2013) have shown that athletes who engage in dual career pathways experience increased life satisfaction, better financial stability, and improved mental health outcomes compared to those who solely focus on sports.

Another opportunity lies in leveraging technology and innovative learning methods to support dual career athletes. The rise of online education, flexible learning platforms, and hybrid training models has enabled athletes to access academic and professional development opportunities without compromising their sports performance. Universities and training institutions that integrate digital learning strategies into their programs can significantly enhance accessibility for athletes, enabling them to manage their studies alongside rigorous training schedules. Digital advancements in career counseling, virtual internships, and remote mentorship programs further provide athletes with the resources needed to build sustainable post-sport careers (Ryom et al., 2021).

Collaborative efforts between sports organizations, academic institutions, and policymakers can also enhance the effectiveness of dual career policies. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can facilitate the development of structured dual career programs, offering academic flexibility, career counseling, financial aid, and mentorship opportunities for athletes. The European Commission (2012) has highlighted successful models in which universities,

employers, and sports federations work together to create environments that support athletes in their dual career journeys. Establishing best practices from these models and implementing them on a broader scale can enhance the accessibility and efficiency of dual career policies globally.

Furthermore, dual career policies contribute to the broader goal of sustainability in sports by promoting athlete development beyond their competitive years. Ensuring that athletes have viable career options post-retirement fosters financial independence and reduces the risk of financial hardship. This long-term approach aligns with the principles of economic sustainability, creating a more stable and resilient sports ecosystem. According to Brown et al. (2023), investing in dual career programs can lead to a more well-rounded athlete workforce, where former athletes transition into roles such as coaching, sports management, and entrepreneurship, contributing to the overall growth and innovation within the sports industry.

In other words, while challenges such as structural limitations, financial constraints, and cultural differences pose significant barriers to the implementation of dual career policies, the opportunities they present outweigh these difficulties. Advancements in digital education, collaborative policy-making, and increased awareness of athlete welfare have paved the way for more effective dual career frameworks. Moving forward, a commitment to enhancing accessibility, financial support, and institutional flexibility will be crucial in ensuring that athletes can successfully navigate both their sporting and professional aspirations. A holistic approach that integrates education, governance, and stakeholder collaboration will be essential in developing sustainable dual career policies that benefit both athletes and society as a whole.

## Conclusions

The concept of dual career athletes and their role in sustainable development is gaining increasing recognition in both academic and policy discussions. As sports continue to professionalize and the demands on athletes grow, ensuring that they have viable career opportunities beyond their athletic endeavors is essential. Sustainability in sports must encompass not only economic and environmental dimensions but also social aspects, ensuring that athletes can transition successfully into post-sport careers while contributing positively to society. The integration of education and professional training alongside sports careers is a crucial element in achieving this goal.

A well-structured dual career framework benefits athletes by providing them with long-term security, reducing the psychological and financial risks associated with career transitions. When supported effectively, dual career athletes develop valuable competencies such as time management, adaptability, and leadership, which serve them well beyond their sports careers. Additionally, fostering dual career pathways contributes to broader societal sustainability by ensuring that the investment in athletes extends beyond their competitive years, promoting their engagement in various professional sectors where their skills and experiences can be highly valuable.

To ensure a sustainable future for dual career athletes, sports organizations, educational institutions, and policymakers must collaborate to establish clear and accessible dual career pathways. This includes providing flexible education programs, financial support, career guidance, and mental health resources tailored to the needs of athletes. Leveraging digital learning platforms and workplace integration initiatives can further enhance the accessibility of dual career opportunities.

In conclusion, dual career athletes represent a model for sustainable development in sports and society. Their ability to balance professional and athletic commitments showcases a pathway toward a more resilient and inclusive sports system. By investing in dual career policies, we not only secure the future of individual athletes but also strengthen the long-term viability of sports as a socially and economically sustainable sector. Ensuring continued support and innovation in dual career frameworks will be vital in shaping the future of sports and its broader societal impact.

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