



A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ACTIVE AND FORMER ELITE ATHLETES

SOFIE SMISMANS

PUBLIC PHD DEFENCE FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR IN MOVEMENT AND SPORT SCIENCES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29TH 2022 AT 18:30
ROOM D0.07, CAMPUS ETTERBEEK

SUPERVISORS

Prof. dr. Paul Wylleman (VUB)
Prof. dr. Koen De Brandt (VUB)

EXAM COMMISSION

Prof. dr. Marc Theeboom (VUB) – chair
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Dr. Deirdre Lyons
Prof. dr. Andreas Küttel



Please confirm your presence before 20/11.



ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH

Athletes typically retire from elite sport at a relatively young age (from 28 to 40 years, depending upon the type of sport; North & Lavalley, 2004; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). As such, athletes still have a large part of their lives ahead of them after athletic retirement, implying they are likely to engage in a new vocational career (Martin et al., 2014). The aim of this PhD was to provide a holistic perspective on the vocational development of elite athletes across three consecutive phases: active phase, retirement phase, and new career phase.

This PhD features four empirical studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods targeting multiple research objectives. Study 1 explored how an educational development environment for athletes in the active phase might facilitate their vocational development in the long term. Study 2 and 3 examined which competencies athletes require to optimise their employability and to what extent athletes possess those competencies. Finally, to further advance our understanding of athletes' employability, Study 4 investigated the perspective of employers on employing active and former elite athletes.

In its entirety, this PhD provides a substantial contribution to the existing literature, as it was the first study to explore athletes' vocational development from a competence and environmental approach across three consecutive phases. Altogether, the findings of those studies recognised that athletes' vocational development is a continuum in an athlete's lifelong career (i.e., across multiple career phases) requiring a competence, integrated environmental, and individualized approach. To facilitate the implementation of these approaches, this PhD provides concrete practical recommendations for multiple stakeholders that inform the development and implementation of strategies to enhance athletes' vocational development.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Sofie Smismans is a researcher and assistant lecturer at the Department of Movement and Sport Sciences (MOSS; faculty of Physical Education) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Sofie is an active member of the research groups Sport Psychology and Mental Support (SPMB), Sport and Society (SASO), and Sports Policy Factors leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS). She graduated at the VUB in 2016 as Master of Science in Sports Management (Magna Cum Laude) and obtained an additional Master of Science in Management (Cum Laude) in 2017. After some working experience in the practical field of sport policy and management (i.e., Special Olympics Belgium, MOEV, Strong Student Run), she got the chance to further develop her interest in sports management by engaging in research activities. Sofie's research interests lie in the broad domain of (elite) sport science and more specifically in the domains of sport management, sport policy and sport psychology.

As a researcher, Sofie is involved in qualitative and quantitative research on (a) high performance management in elite sport, and (b) sport psychology and mental support. Concretely, Sofie was actively involved in the coordination of multiple international research projects for the European Commission: "[Be a Winner In elite Sport and Employment before and after athletic Retirement](#)" (B-WISER; 2017-2018), "[Mind the Gap](#)" (2018-2020), "[Ecology of Dual Careers](#)" (ECO-DC; 2018-2019). "[Empowering the Public Value of Sport through Athletes as Role Models](#)" and for the International Olympic Committee ("How should athletes be supported before, during, and after athletic retirement? Moving from an athletic-centred needs analysis to practical guidelines for career support stakeholders"). Sofie's research activities resulted in several reports, publications, workshops, and presentations of research results to policy makers (e.g., Sport Vlaanderen) and on national and international conferences (e.g., EASM, ECP, FEPSAC, VBSW).

