

Socio-psychological problems of highly trained athletes upon completion of sports career

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Abstract:

Purpose: to develop measures and scientifically grounded proposals for the effective social adaptation of highly trained athletes who are about to complete their sports career. Materials and methods: the study was conducted at Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (Moscow, Russia) in the form of an interactive questionnaire. We interviewed 30 athletes who performed for the Russian national teams in the period from 2008 to 2018. Results: the problem of demand upon completion of active performance evokes anxiety in all survey participants, regardless of age, level of sports mastery and type of sport. Currently, the majority of respondents receive material support from the state. However, dissatisfaction with the amount of material support is alarming. All of the respondents found it difficult to answer what level of support they would like to receive from state bodies for the successful transition upon completion of their sports career. This indicates the lack of systemic and large-scale positive examples of such opportunities for these athletes. Conclusion: based on foreign and domestic experience, as well as on the opinion surveys of athletes who perform for Russian national teams at international level, proposals were developed for the socio-psychological adaptation of highly trained athletes. These proposals are addressed both to state bodies and to the sports community in general.

Key Words: highly trained athletes, adaptation, social-support measures, scientifically grounded proposals for labour, educational and social integration of athletes upon completion of sports career.

Introduction

The problem of transition from "top-class sport" to ordinary life attracts the attention of specialists (Kuzmin et al., 2018; Priyanka & Chaitanya Sridhar, 2014; Germanov et al., 2014; Khorunzhy, 2011; Shikhverdiyev, 2011; Ivanov, 2009; Makeeva et al., 2009; Bezrukov, 2002), and the issues of alleviation are partially solved in various directions (Stier, 2007; Stambulova, Jäphag & Stephan, 2007; Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008). However, currently there is an imperfection and incompleteness of the Russian Federation legislation regarding the regulation of social protection of high-class athletes, including those who have completed a competitive career (Kuzmin et al., 2018; Germanov et al., 2014; Khorunzhy, 2011; Shikhverdiyev, 2011). At the same time, the «Strategy for the Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Russian Federation until 2020», approved by the Government of Russia from 07.08.2009 № 1101-r, indicates the need of developing a system of measures for the social protection of athletes. To solve this problem, it is necessary to create a multi-level system of social adaptation, multidirectional training and inclusion of high-level athletes in the post-competitive period of life (Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014), containing labor, educational and social integration (Sanders & Stevinson, 2017). At the same time, a significant problem is the sport orientation of the individual, which has formed over the years of preparation for responsible starts, which complicates the process of re-socialization of former sportsmen (Germanov et al., 2014).

Completing a career in sports, athletes need to switch to a completely new professional activity or a fundamentally new level of work activity in physical education and sports, especially in terms of the technologization of society, the development of the digital economy, computer technology and the development of recreational and sports services (Stolyar et al., 2018). With an integrated approach to the solution to the outlined problems with simultaneous introduction of necessary mechanisms of social support of athletes, it is possible to reduce social tension and negative social consequences from the lack of a solution of these problems much more effectively (Germanov et al., 2014; Makeeva et al., 2009).

The degree of adaptation of a person to a particular situation is determined by two groups of criteria: objective (characteristics of activity, its success, employment) and subjective (emotional states, human satisfaction, assessment of social conditions). At the same time, personal qualities play the role of the leading regulator of adaptation (Makeeva et al., 2009), the degree of their severity can predict the quality of adaptation to the activity. Currently, variable models of psychological and pedagogical support of athletes completing their professional careers, the classification of psychological and pedagogical conditions of social adaptation of athletes completing their professional careers are relevant (Kuzmin et al., 2018).

The purpose of the study: to identify the measures and science-based proposals for effective integration of high-level sportsmen ending their careers.

The object of the study: highly qualified athletes in the process of active sports activities and after ending of a sports career. The subject of the study is a multi-level system of social adaptation of training and inclusion of high-level athletes in the "life after a big-time sports".

Material & methods

Participants. The survey was conducted at the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (Moscow, Russia) as a poll through the interactive questionnaire. Respondents (n=30, at the age of 18-28) – are highly skilled sportsmen, who stand for the Russian national team (n=24) and who have completed their sport career (n=6) from 2008 to 2018. Among them: Merited Masters of Sport – 4, Masters of Sport, International Class – 6, Masters of Sport – 18, Candidates for Master of Sport – 2. The athletes represent both individual sports: winter ones, combat sports, swimming, and team sports: basketball, etc.

Procedure. The questionnaire consisted of questions aimed at the researching the sportsmen's attitudes towards their future and the determination of an activity motivation, the sphere of further professional activity, life priorities. The type of data sample: a target sample; the sampling frequency: single; the form of sociological survey: a questionnaire survey (electronic version); the contact method: in absentia.

Statistical analysis. Mathematical processing was carried out with the spreadsheet program MS Excel 2010 and the StatPlus2009 program. Processing of the results included method of ranking factors of sportsmen's social-psychological adaptation, at that the scale of ranking was formed from 1 to N, where N is the number of selected factors (reasons, answer variant). In the ranking process, the sequential number in the sample is called rank. Statistical data processing was carried out according to generally accepted methods of variation statistics with the calculation of the arithmetic mean (\bar{X}).

Results

It should be noted that 65% of respondents tie their lives with sport, 10 % - with non-sport related professions, 25 % - didn't think about it. Most of respondents consider their own or their students' sport achievements as their main goals for the next year – 65 %. Among the respondents the greatest authority is enjoyed by parents or the coach – 50%. Answers related with any well-known personalities (Elon Musk, A. Legkov, etc.) occur once. 25% of respondents, who have achieved the greatest results, have no role models (they are the champions of the world, the champions of Europe, the World Cup winners).

100% of answers on a question about willingness to do any activity after ending sport career are related to desire to participate in social useful activity. There is a large variability in answers related to the desired wage rate: from 40 000 to 1 000 000 rubles, 25% of respondents have found it difficult to answer. More than a half of respondents (20) do not feel insecure about their future. 3 people are feeling very insecure (4-5 points); 3 people have average points; 5 people have no fear of the future. 100% of the respondents get financial support from the state for their activities. However, about a half of them would like it to be more.

Answers about attitude towards failures in sport are distributed as follows: «They frustrate me» - 20 %, «They motivate me» - 65 %, «They do not confuse me» - 15 %. 100% of the respondents believe that not only sport helped them in self-realization. All people surveyed have creative hobbies as well: photography, poetry, drawing, etc. Most of them find their sport achievements high (an average point + 2,5).

Feelings about retirement were distributed as follows:

- a) I feel anxious, I did not want to finish my sport career – 30 %.
- б) I feel proud, I am satisfied about my achievements – 25 %.
- в) I feel indefiniteness, I do not know what to do in the future - 15 %.
- г) I feel discouragement, I would like to achieve more - 30 %.

All of the respondents consider themselves capable to assimilate in a new profession in another field after quitting sport. Thus, 70% of respondents think they can support young athletes and share experience with them.

The answers to the question whether the respondents are ready for injuries were distributed as follows:

- 1. Yes, if it is necessary – 40 %.
- 2. No, I do not think it is necessary condition – 55 %.
- 3. No, I am not ready to do such sacrifices even to achieve a result – 5 %.

Current conditions (social, physical, etc.) for self-realization are positively assessed by the majority of respondents (an average point +3,4). The respondents also think that nowadays there are favorable conditions for sportsmen's self-realization after quitting professional sport (fig. 1).

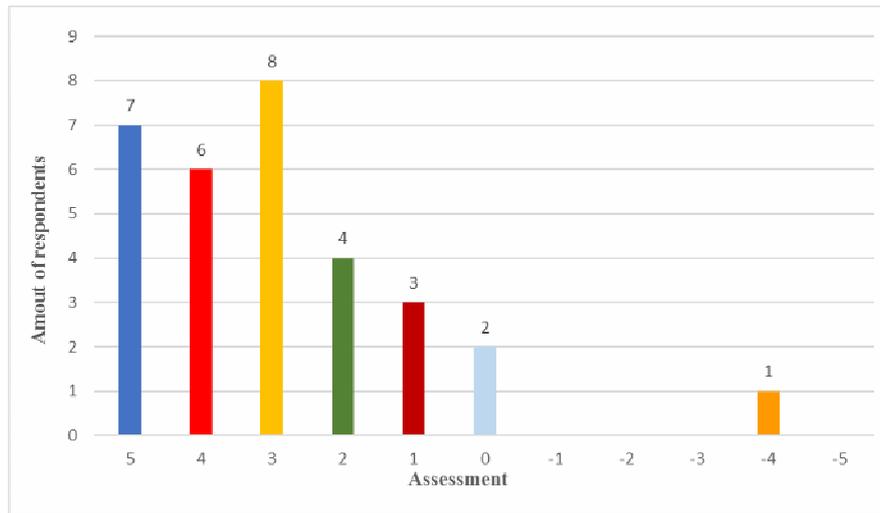


Fig. 1 – Assessment of self-realization opportunities after quitting sport career (according to the survey results)

Positive assessment of opportunities to achieve their potential and to succeed in an after-sport career – an average point + 3,5.

The answers to the question whether the respondents are dependent on a state aid or social support measures were distributed as follows (for details, refer fig. 2):

- 1) quoting of management, coaching vacancies in the high-performance sports – an average point is 3,78;
- 2) payment of financial benefits within 10 years after quitting the career – 3,44;
- 3) provision of credit (mortgage) at low interest rate – 3,05;
- 4) guaranteed employment in the sphere of physical education and sports – 4,27;
- 5) involvement in public activities (television, radio, internet, presentations, sport exhibitions, master-classes, lectures in the physical education universities, consulting in sport) - 4,05;
- 6) provision of retaining and qualification improvement courses – 4,18;
- 7) another variant – 3 respondents – 4,33.

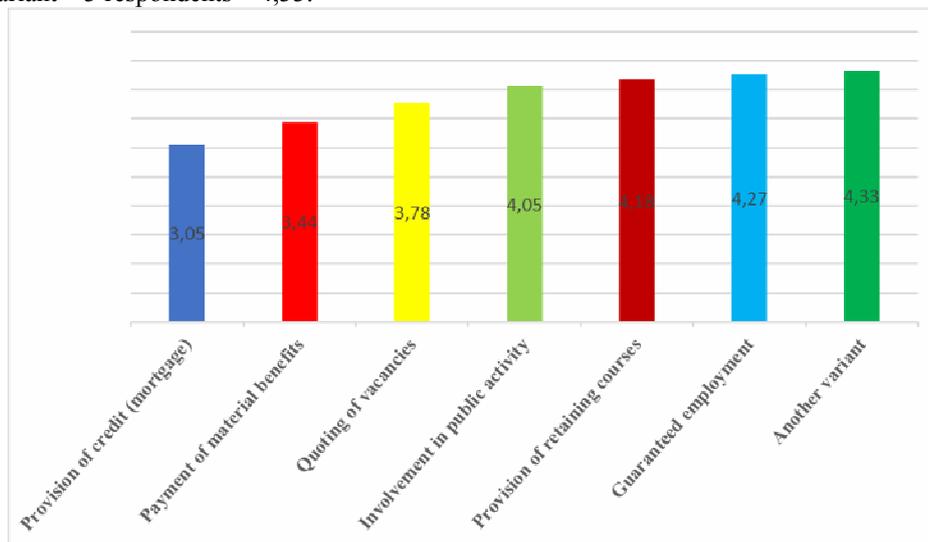


Fig. 2 – The results of the survey concerning social support measures of the sportsmen, who have ended their sport career (an average rank)

The survey showed that the demand after quitting sport issue causes anxiety of all of the participants irrespective of age, the sportsmanship level or the kind of sport. Nowadays the majority of participants get financial support from the state, however dissatisfaction with the magnitude of this support is high. All of the participants are ready to help young athletes, which indicates an understanding of public responsibility. So, it is possible to speak about the possibility of effective usage of their professional and social potential. Among the suggested variants of their own views of support, the most popular are financial measures and opportunities related to education. The respondents themselves found it difficult to answer what kind of support they would like to get from the state for the most successful entry into life after quitting sports. This indicates a lack of systematic and mass positive examples of such opportunities in their life.

Discussion

Nowadays (at the level of legislative decree of federal significance) highly skilled athletes have privileges for entering to higher educational institutions: The Order № 3 of the Russian Federation Ministry of

Education and Science from 9 January 2014. The right of admission without entrance examinations have: article 71, paragraph 4 of the Federal Act from 2012, № 273-FA «Education in Russian Federation» (Russian Federation Code, 2012, № 53, art. 7598; 2013, № 19, art. 2326; № 30, art. 4036; № 48, art. 6165): the champions and awardees of Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and Deaflympics, World champions, European champions, first-place winners of World championships and European championship in sports, which are included in the program of the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and Deaflympics, in specialties and (or) training programs in the field of physical education and sports.

In 2001, the Institute of New Educational Technologies in Physical Education and Sports was established (Orel, Russia, the “Olympus” center). The institute was created to train talented athletes, members of national teams of Russia who aspire to get higher professional education in the specialty “Sports Management”, without ceasing their training for high-level competitions. The established institution contributes to the realization of one of the social protection elements of high-level athletes – obtaining higher professional education. The analysis of foreign experience of athletes’ socialization has shown that it is recommended to encourage athletes to access individual support services through programs such as NACE, with the aim of teaching them topics such as achieving a balance between sport and life, setting effective goals in both sport and life, and career management. As a result, athletes may be more prepared to perceive significant life events, such as injury or retirement and use different resources to cope with the stress. Such resources may include developing a career plan after doing sports or developing various strategies of managing stress (Khorunzhyi, 2011; Shikhverdiyev, 2011). In addition, foreign experience suggests that career ending injury is strongly associated with higher chances of depressive symptoms at the point of retirement. Athletes experience chronic pain, but a high sense of athletic identity remains with them, which is an additional prerequisite for depression (Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008). The reduction of depression after retiring from sports presumes the following factors: finding an interest in other activities; developing skills in stress and time management; encouraging strong relationships with coaches, family, friends and managers, who care about sports success, as well as personal growth; consulting with a sports psychologist to help explore further ways and methods of adaptation (Shikhverdiyev, 2011). In contrast to the studies referenced above, we identified factors of social adaptation of athletes after ending a sports career, their expectations and future prospects. A mechanism has been developed for the inclusion of athletes in social, educational and labor activities (fig. 3).

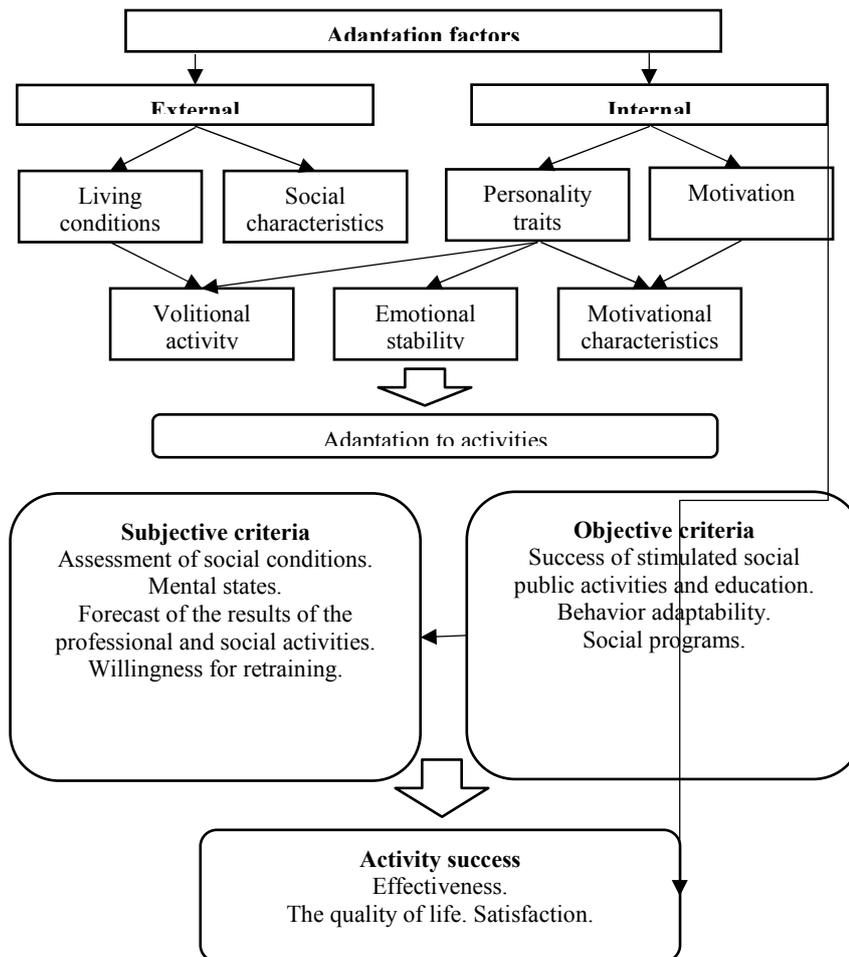


Fig. 3 – The mechanism of inclusion athletes in social, educational, labor activities after the end of a sport career

Conclusions

On the basis of preliminary surveys and conversations with active specialists in the field of higher achievements in sports, as well as on the basis of personal experiences of sports and post-sports career, the following proposals were developed for social adaptation to the post-sports stage of life, which solve a number of negative aspects and limitations of certain problems during the transition of high-class athletes to another type of work, using their potential obtained during the period of vigorous competitive activity. Proposals sent to executive authorities, sports organizations, and educational institutions include the following:

- 1) establishing a quota of vacancies in physical education and sports organizations, for athletes who are ending regular competitive activity and their gradual inclusion into work even while they are still actively practicing sports;
- 2) professional preparation and retraining on the basis of existing educational institutions in the field of physical education, sports, sports management, the industry of sports and hotel business, sport psychology, management and others;
- 3) payments of benefit allowances in the course of 10 years from the moment of ending the sports career, examining the possibility of creating personal savings accounts for accumulating various types of payments (parts of scholarships, prize bonuses, etc., with the opportunity of using these funds after the end of the sports career);
- 4) formation of a support system for employment of athletes who have completed their sports career, on the basis of the online platform of the Ministry of Sports of the Russian Federation, in the form of an online portal of vacancies with SEO, that would take into account their experience and potential gained during sports competitions;
- 5) development of a mechanism for inclusion in public and educational activities (attracting athletes to participate in master classes, presentations, consultations, lectures, social projects for children, sports video advertising, webinars);
- 6) variable models of psychological and pedagogical support for athletes completing a professional career, classification of psychological and pedagogical conditions of social adaptation of athletes;
- 7) a set of measures to provide medical and recreational activities with the recommendations from the Ministry of Health;
- 8) creation of conditions for future career guidance and training still during the active sports career while on training camps through various methods (field lectures and seminars, meetings, videoconferences);
- 9) development of educational programs and specific plans in universities for various types of courses, that would take into account the long absence of athletes from those studies. At the same time, it is necessary to study and leverage the experience of leading sports universities in the Soviet era (for example, the Russian State University of Physical Education, Sports, Youth and Tourism, based in Moscow, Russia).

Conflicts of interest - The authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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