

## **An investigation of the demands faced and support needed by elite dual career adolescent badminton players and their entourage**

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**Introduction:** One of the most significant challenges for adolescent athletes is to cope with the demands of a dual career, which includes balancing school and sport responsibilities (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015). While research has highlighted the effects of a dual career upon adolescent athletes' physical and mental wellbeing, performance, and sport continuation; the processes that contribute, positively or negatively, to dual career development in adolescence remains unclear (Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015). The lack of clarity concerning adolescent athletes' dual careers can be attributed to different sporting contexts presenting different demands or challenging moments; and, the influence of an individual's entourage (i.e., parents, coaches, and teachers; Knight & Holt, 2012). Consequently, the specific demands and support needs of adolescent athletes warrant further investigation, with particular focus upon the specific sporting context. Dual career research including both the athlete and their entourage has the potential to support the development of adolescents' athletic performance, welfare, and retention in sports. Using a badminton-specific context, the current research aimed to explore the demands and support needs of elite adolescent dual career badminton players and their entourage. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Describe the demands and challenges dual career adolescent badminton players and their entourage faced throughout a badminton season;
2. Identify the most demanding periods for players throughout a badminton season;
3. Explore the support needs of dual career badminton players and their entourage during these demanding periods.

**Methods:** Qualitative data was collected through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Participants included male and female regional academy players aged 11-15 years ( $n = 8$ ) and members from within their entourage (parents and/or guardians,  $n = 8$ ; badminton staff, including the National Academy Coach, CEO, Performance Manager, and Player Manager; and, a teacher). Data was collected at two time points (December 2018-January 2019 and June-July 2019) and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to gain an understanding of the demands athletes and their entourage faced throughout a badminton season. Focus groups and interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes, resulting in 524 minutes of audio recorded data.

**Results and Discussion:** The demands faced by elite adolescent dual career badminton players relate to educational requirements (e.g., studying for exams, coursework, and homework); injury management; expectations to perform (from internal/external sources); and, time management. Entourage members, including parents, badminton staff, and a PE teacher, reported two main demands faced in attempting to support dual career badminton players. First, the level of communication between network members; and second, time and resource constraints, both of which negatively impacted upon entourage members' ability to optimally support dual career badminton players.

### **Conclusion:**

Elite dual career adolescent badminton players face a number of demands throughout a season, including managing educational requirements, injuries, expectation to perform, and

time, which challenge their athletic and vocational development. The intensity of these demands increases during education examination/assessment periods. As these periods can be predicted and planned for, the frequency and clarity of communication between all members of the players' entourage should be managed to increase transparency to allow players and their entourage to effectively prepare for these challenging times. Players may also benefit from greater flexibility in training regimes during demanding educational examination/assessment periods, combined with educational workshops to facilitate management of personal and others' performance expectations, as well as time. Finally, entourage members highlighted the importance of communication in order for all members to best prepare and manage the time and resource challenges of supporting a dual career badminton player.

### References

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