

Positive and negative aspects of « Sport + Studies Programmes » organized at secondary school level, perceived by athletes and their classmates



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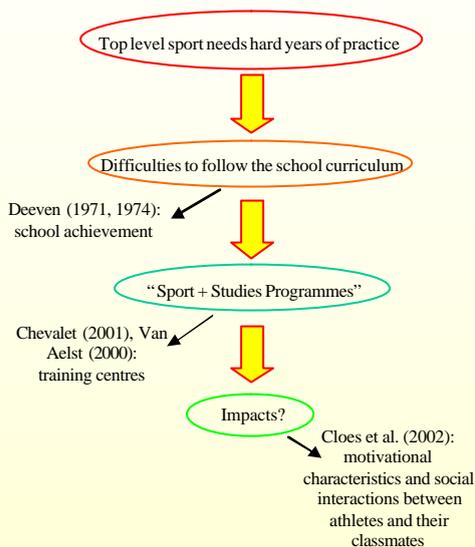
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Statement of the problem



Goals of the study

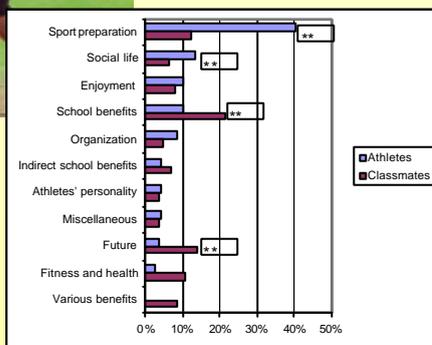
- ♦ To identify positive and negative aspects of "Sport + Studies Programmes" pointed out by both athletes and their classmates.
- ♦ To analyse the opinions' changes between the beginning and the end of the school year.

Methods

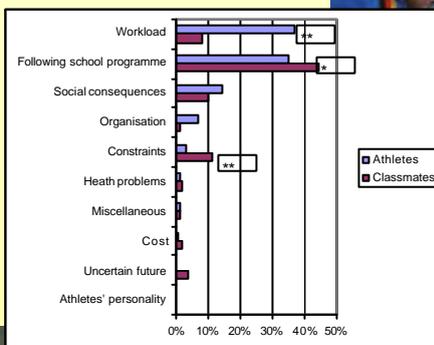
- ♦ 22 athletes (tennis, volleyball, soccer, judo and rugby) and 283 classmates from four secondary schools (12 to 18 year old) located in Wallonia filled in a questionnaire (open questions) in November 1999 and in May 2000. Principals were interviewed in 2001 to comment the results. Interanalyst reliability reached 80% of agreement.

Results

- ♦ Athletes reported a mean of 2.9 items for positive aspects and 2.5 for negative ones. Classmates were less productive in their answers with, respectively 1.8 and .5 items. They were less concerned by the project. Moreover, it is noteworthy that there were more positive than negative items. That could mean that students were globally satisfied about the "SSP".
- ♦ Among positive aspects, athletes underlined particularly (1) the advantages of the "SSP" related to the sport preparation (40.4 Vs 12.0 % ; $z = 7.746$; $p < .001$), and (2) the gains provided by their social life (13.2 Vs 6.2 % ; $z = 2.635$; $p = .008$). Classmates pointed out (1) the direct school gains related to the opportunity to combine school and sport (21.4 Vs 9.9 % ; $z = 3.056$; $p = .002$) and (2) the future, a category concerning the opportunity to start a sport career (13.8 Vs 3.3 % ; $z = 3.417$; $p < .001$). Athletes paid more attention to positive aspects linked to the preferred activity. Classmates seemed more attentive to the opportunities provided to athletes to get diploma. They also could be influenced by the dream of outstanding careers.
- ♦ At the beginning of the year, among negative aspects, athletes reported mainly their workload (36.9 %) and the problems encountered to follow successfully the school programme (44.3 %). However, they seemed not very aware of the tiredness of young athletes (8.6 % ; $z = 7.797$; $p < .001$). They gave also more importance to some constraints endured by athletes (less freedom, less free time) (11.5 Vs 3.1 % ; $z = 2.69$; $p = .007$). Athletes and classmates did not assess the problems in the same way. Teachers and educators should take into account differences in classes. Lack of communication could lead to conflict by misunderstanding.



« It's super cool! »



« Pfff! It's too difficult »



« It's super cool! »

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| Sport preparation: "We can have more training sessions", "Our improvement is really better", "They can continue to play" |
| Social life: "My family can have a normal life", "There is a good climate between us", "We meet top athletes and have many friends" |
| Enjoyment: "School days are less difficult", "We do what we like", "They have fun" |
| School benefits: "It's possible to continue to study without dropping out for competition", "They can study and work hard in their sport", "It's perfect to complete your studies when you want to compete at a high level" |
| Organization: "The training conditions are better than elsewhere", "The training schedule is favourable" |
| Indirect school benefit: "It's easier for us", "Teachers are less demanding with them" |
| Athletes' personality "We become more responsible", "It's very good for the character" |
| Miscellaneous: "It's good" |
| Future: "It's important for the future", "They will earn money", "It's important for their career" |
| Fitness and health: "One stay in good health", "They are in a good shape", "They are fit" |
| Various benefits: « Athletes bring something to the school »; « One can be close to well known athletes »; « It's a good thing for the sport in our country » |



- ♦ Athletes' opinion did not change during the year. At the end of the year, classmates considered that enjoyment and sport preparation were advantages for athletes ($z \leq 3$; $p \leq .022$). The two main categories identified at the beginning of the year were significantly less mentioned ($z \leq 2.3$; $p \leq .055$). Classmates could become aware of the reality of the sport world. Few changes were observed on negative aspects along the school year. Both groups tended to report more social drawback as lack of contact within classes.

« Pfff! It's too difficult »

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| Workload: "We are often completely tired", "The tiredness is always there" |
| Following school programme: "It's difficult to study", "I can't prepare all my homework and lessons", "They often miss courses" |
| Social consequences : « It's impossible to participate to other activities with our classmates, I never meet my friends », "We never see them outside the school" |
| Organization : « We can't eat what we want », « Our training sessions are planned immediately after the lunch » |
| Constraints : « No freedom », « Practice sessions continue too late » |
| Health problems: "There are a lot of injuries" |
| Miscellaneous: "It's problematic" |
| Cost: "That's expensive" |
| Uncertain future: "If they got an injury, their career will stop immediately" |
| Athletes' personality "Some of them risk to be disappointed" |

- ♦ Principals showed clearly that they were aware of the athletes' opinions. They were able to explain the results of the study in relation to classmates opinions. This underlines their knowledge of what is happening in their school.

Conclusion "Sport + Studies Programmes" could be considered as a positive experience. However, some improvement should be found to better help students to manage the heavy training load. Results showed also that classmates were not aware of the problems perceived by athletes. Practical implications could be drawn from this study to help principals in developing new strategies.