INTERNATIONAL WEIGHTLIFTING FEDERATION

GUIDELINES

ATHLETES' CAREER

2013

PREAMBLE

The Olympic Movement has identified the challenge that many athletes are facing when they have to consider their situation and life when retiring from elite sport.

In the same vein, the IWF has decided to address this issue in analysing the situation and be in a position to provide adequate assistance to athletes. The purpose of this document is therefore to raise awareness and to sensitise the Weightlifting community (from Member Federations to Clubs, from Executive Board Members to Coaches) to create the right environment for athletes career plans.

INTRODUCTION

From the strategic direction described in the preamble, it has been identified that for some athletes, there were:

1. Difficulties to identify their new life after retiring from competition sport, with 2 different approaches to handle the situation :
    a. Anticipation / preparation of the transition;
    b. Search for future activity after termination (by choice or not, in case of injury) of the weightlifting career
2. Difficulties to raise a subject that remains quite taboo. Who to talk? Who can help?
3. Challenges at reintegration (decreasing media interest, reality of the environment, new organization of the domestic sphere, risk of depression / alcoholism / drug)

From these findings, the IWF has decided to explore the following paths:

1. Prepare athletes, at least through raising awareness
2. Train athletes to develop specific skills, (media relations, etc...)
3. Assist athletes to combine Sport and Work or Education (time management, prioritization, etc).[1]
4. Develop appropriate support from the entourage (MF, club, coach)
5. Provide a network of expertise enabling the athletes to feel supported / accompanied in finding their way after elite sport.

1. VISION AND ROLE OF THE IWF

As life after a weightlifting career is important to the IWF, it will offer some assistance and give a stimulus to what should be done at the national level, considering that the most important support has to be provided locally. In many countries, Governments and NOCs already provide programmes and assistance, during and after the sporting career, that MFs and clubs could use. It is however important that athletes keep in mind that they have the responsibility during their career to prepare for later life.

[1] When referring to this area, the document will speak about "Dual Career" which is the terminology regularly used in the world of Sport since about 10 years.

Even if direct actions should remain the primary responsibility of MF, clubs and Governments, the IWF can gather, coordinate and share resources among its stakeholders in providing support through specific actions (information sessions during World Championships, network in place to assist MFs and athletes that have specific demands, etc…)

2. CAREER MANAGEMENT
Raising awareness to prepare for the post-sport career

Raising awareness, providing information and vocational counselling in preparation for a post-sport career is an integral part of the athletes' career management process and contributes to their success. Indeed, helping them to prepare for the post-competition career has the ability to enhance perceptions of control, develop life-skills, improve balance of life in order to positively influence the reconversion phase. Moreover, career development assists athletes to develop work and social skills, enabling them to deal more effectively with the pressure of being elite athletes, and suffer less anxiety about being a late starter in a career outside sport.

3. DEVELOP SPECIFIC SKILLS

Athletes can take advantage of the skills and qualities they possess or have developed through the sport / competition in order to apply them in a non-sporting context, particularly at the moment to retire from the elite level.

For example, the following skills represent a clear asset: Health and Nutrition, Media training, Time Management, Goal setting, Decision-making, Priorities setting, Problem-solving, Stress management, etc…

4. COMBINE WEIGHTLIFTING WITH WORK / STUDIES

The goal to succeed at the highest level in weightlifting demands intensive training and competitions at home and abroad, which can be difficult to reconcile with the challenges and restrictions in the labour market and the educational system. Not only high levels of motivation, commitment or resilience from the athlete, but also special arrangements are needed to avoid the situation where athletes are forced to choose between work and sport or education and sport. Such "dual career" arrangements should be beneficial for athletes' sporting careers, allow for work or education and promote the attainment of a new career after the sporting career.

The challenge to combine high level weightlifting competition with another activity

The success of dual career arrangements often depends on the goodwill of persons in key positions of an organisation (federations, clubs, etc…), while a systematic approach based on general and sustainable financial arrangements is needed as well. The organisation of individualised pathways during studies is demanding while extra 'holidays' are a problem in the labour market. Athletes should not be in a disadvantaged position compared to other workers in

the labour market. Enterprises may perceive it as difficult to adapt to the changing employment needs that athletes *have at different stages of their careers. The main challenges are:*
- The balance between sports training and education and, at a later stage of life, the balance between sports training and employment;
- The end-of-sporting-career phase of athletes *including those who leave the system earlier than planned*

4.1. General timeline of athletes' careers

"Dual careers" in sport encapsulates the requirement for athletes to successfully initiate, develop and finalise an elite sporting career as part of a lifelong career, in combination with a job and/or the pursuit of education/studies. Dual careers generally span a period of 15 to 20 years. Different stages of athletes' development have been identified in a range of models starting from the introduction in a sport to the development towards a talent, the perfection of performance in the mastery stage, and the stage of ending a high-level sport career and looking for a new career.

The length of each stage varies depending on the type of sport and other factors such as gender and personal ability. Specialisation will occur during adolescence in most sports. Not all sport careers span all stages. In weightlifting, the development stage starts later than in other sports.

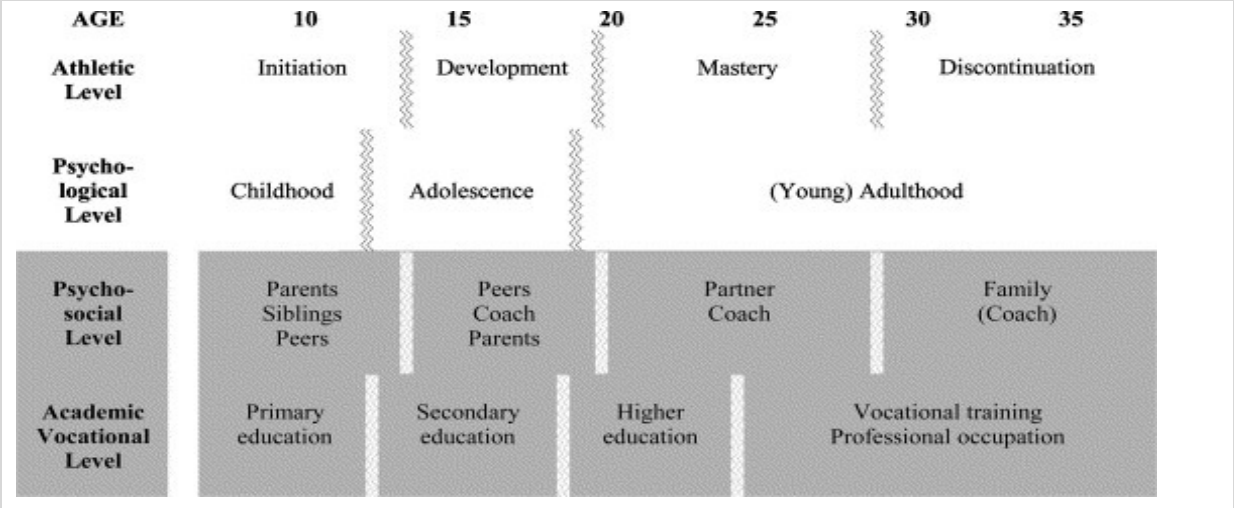

Fig. 1. A developmental model of transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational level (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)

As shown in Figure 1, an athletic career is determined by developments on an athletic level as well as on psychological, psychosocial and academic and vocational levels. Interactions occur between these levels of development and transitions are encountered by athletes throughout their sporting careers. Alongside transitions that can be expected, athletes also face less predictable transitions (e.g. an injury or change of personal coach) which can equally have a big impact on the quality of their participation in education, work, competitive sport and life in general.

4.2. Importance of the Role of the IWF and the MFs

The IWF promotes and supports the inclusion of the concept of dual careers in the various activities of their member organisations (MFs, Clubs, etc…), taking into account the position of athletes, a long-term strategic approach to dual career arrangements and the availability of supporting services and facilities.

A strategy to involve athletes in IWF governing bodies and integrate their points of view in decision-making processes should be developed. Good practices include Athletes' Commission, consultation processes of athletes in decision-making, specific election processes to include athletes in their governing body, facilities or programmes to support and spread athletes' opinions, priority access for athletes to employment or voluntary activities in the sport organisation's programmes. As the IWF already has an Athletes' Commission, our aim is to involve them much more in the Athletes' Career program utilizing their experience.

Example of good practice

Recently, the IOC included in its evaluation of International Federations an assessment of athletes career programmes, which should integrate the dual career approach. This represents an important step since, as it is identified as a must-do, International federations will contribute to the whole process.

4.3. Importance of the role of the Coaches

Coaches play a crucial role at the start of a potential elite career. As the future of young athletes, both as sportsmen and as persons, is partly in their hands, it is essential that coaches are qualified at the appropriate level for the roles they undertake in this stage of the athletes' career. They also need to have the competences to understand different types of risks that may be faced by athletes, and not only the risks directly linked to sports training. The lifestyle of talented and elite athletes and the lifelong development of the athlete as a person should be included in their approach to the athlete.

Coaches should take care that athletes improve their technical, physical and mental capabilities, but also develop their personal, social and lifestyle capabilities through educational and career pathways. All staff of clubs and MFs should view the athletes as a whole person and promote the development of life skills (e.g. effective communication, dealing with success and failure, time/stress management, etc.) in such a way that these skills are not only displayed within sport, but also in life and career development. Fair play and an environment where performance is improved through legitimate means, underpinned by a clear anti-doping philosophy, should be promoted.

This approach requires a mind-shift so as to recognise the role of coaches in this perspective. IWF Code of Ethics, including the principles of dual careers, is part of the IWF's approach regarding the entourage of athletes. Moreover, it is an opportunity to review the requirements necessary to become a coach (qualifications, accreditation of different educational levels). The profiles, roles, tasks and needed competences, skills and knowledge described in the international coaching framework developed by the International Council for Coaching

Excellence (ICCE) and the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) (2012), could be helpful in this process. This approach will align coaching competences with the needs of talented and elite athletes and make them transparent in case coaches choose a job in another country or are recruited from abroad to run training programmes.

4.4. Supporting services

Most athletes can only develop dual careers if they benefit, alongside a balanced team / entourage, from effective supporting services. The conflicting requirements of sport, work and education, financial frameworks, a general lack of time and high pressure due to expected exceptional performance in sport make the availability of such services a precondition for success. Academic evidence has highlighted the importance of a strong support structure to help elite athletes achieve their sporting ambitions as part of their life-long strategy.[2]
This is an opportunity for the IWF to develop and reinforce the role of the athletes' entourage.

Dual career supporting services should be promoted among the athletes, coaches, MFs and clubs. Athletes outside the scope of specific educational institutes and high-performance training centres are often not aware of the existence of supporting programmes.

Supporting services may notably include:

- Psychological assistance including personal development training courses, career discovery, planning, development and coaching, lifestyle management, skills to prepare and cope with transition and change, crises interventions;
- Educational guidance and information;
- Employment guidance and information, preparation for a new job.

In a similar way as coaches, professionals and volunteers working in MFs and clubs should be competent and qualified to work with talented and elite athletes. They should have expertise related to the challenges faced by athletes during and after their sporting career. Counsellors may well be former elite athletes who qualified for the job through an adapted educational pathway recognising learning experiences of the former athletes themselves.

Recommendation – *IWF and Member Federations should promote the implementation of the dual career concept in the* IWF Code of Ethics *for coaches and other members of MFs and clubs*.

Recommendation – *IWF and MFs should support stakeholders in dual careers to ensure that through supporting services and structures:*

1) Expertise on dual career topics is available and accessible to all stakeholders involved;
2) Dual career support (including support for career transitions and crisis-management and coping interventions) is available to all recognised talented, elite and retired athletes*;*
3) The quality and content of supporting services meet the demands of athletes.

[2] Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000.

4.5. Distance learning

The development of a range of flexible forms of education delivery is critical to meeting the needs of student-athletes in all types of education. Distance learning in particular may provide student- athletes with flexibility in terms of the timing and location of their sporting and academic activities. However, distance learning programmes require a heavy investment of resources for the development and testing of materials prior to the launching of a module. Costs can be reduced if educational authorities develop platforms, curricula and programmes together.

5. EMPLOYMENT

5.1. Combination of work and weightlifting

As part of their employment and sport policies, some countries have structures in place to provide advice and support to athletes in their career planning, including programmes with agreed arrangements between companies and athlete staff to balance sport schedule demands with business needs.

Some countries allocate a number of posts within the public sector specifically to athletes. In some countries, top athletes can work for the government and public institutions, or positions are available in the military, the border police, the forestry sector and/or the customs service. Different models exist, varying from athletes getting training for a function in these services or having a part-time. In general, athletes are very positive about these opportunities.

The introduction of systems of financial support to athletes in some countries has enabled an increasing number of them to become full-time athletes. However, a substantial number of elite athletes still need to earn a steady income through part-time or full-time employment to supplement sport-related funding. For these athletes, flexibility in employment is essential to combine weightlifting and employment and achieving the right balance. However, combining the practice of high-level sport with employment in a non-sport sector can be challenging. Employers may not understand the pressures and physical demands that high-level sport places on an athlete and fear the risk of sport injuries that may affect the performance and attendance of athletes at their workplace. On the sport side, self-imposed performance pressure and pressure from coaches can limit the amount of flexibility and understanding for work outside of sport. In order to succeed, flexibility on the part of both employers and coaches is needed.

5.2. Transition to the post-sport career

The transition to the post-sport career or athletic retirement is the one inevitable transition for athletes that mixes athletic context (e.g. reasons for termination in sports, athletic career satisfaction) with non-athletic context relevant to starting a new life after sports. Retired athletes have to accept retirement and adjust to the status of a former athlete, start/continue studies or work, reconsider their personal identity, and renew their lifestyles and social networks. Research has confirmed that several factors are “weighted” in the decision-making process and become responsible for an athlete’s decision to terminate his sporting career. Some of these factors relate to sport (e.g. de-selection, stagnation, injuries) and others to the future life (e.g. job offer,

wish to start a family). The more the athlete retires in the context of future plans, the easier his/her retirement process is likely to be.

Resources assisting athletes in the transition to the post-sport career should consist of:

- Retirement planning in advance (i.e. when the athlete is still active);
- Voluntary termination;
- Multiple personal identity and positive experiences in roles other than the athlete role (e.g. as an employee);
- Effective social support from family, coach, peers, MFs or clubs.

All of these can facilitate athletes' subjective control over the retirement process and their active coping strategies in dealing with major transition issues. Alternatively, a lack of support from coaches, sport peers, MFs and clubs may lead to additional difficulties with retirement planning and further adaptation. The more the athlete focuses exclusively on sport, the more he/she is vulnerable in the transition to the post-sport career. These findings confirm the need for dual career programmes to empower athletes during their sporting career in their preparation for the post-sport career, facilitate their adaptation to life after sport and help them to avoid crisis-transition scenarios.

Some countries support initiatives from IFs, NOCs or MFs in the field of supporting services, in particular with job placement companies and major sponsors. Such services can be continued and strengthened by:

- Providing (retired) elite athletes with opportunities to meet-and-greet with employers and to gain information about jobs, expectations and requirements in enterprises;
- Monitoring available jobs and making information available to (retired) elite athletes;
- Establishing a liaison officer for relations with human resources departments of interested employers;
- Establishing opportunities for flexible internships, (part-time) employment, short-time employment, graduate trainee programmes and mentoring by senior business managers;
- Establishing a local and regional network of partnerships with interested enterprises, complemented with a network of recruitment partners;
- Organising specific events (e.g. seminars, conferences, workshops, networking events, job markets) to assist athletes in gaining insight into a vocational career in combination with, or after, their sporting career.

Example of good practice

The Finnish "Sports Academy Network" informs athletes about the services available to them including additional advice on job placement services (www.huippu-urheilija.fi).

Recommendation – *MFs and clubs should set up, at the national level, a network of complementary public and private partners enabling elite* athletes *to combine in an optimal way their athletic and vocational careers in public services (military, police, customs etc.) and private businesses.*

6. IWF EDUCATION PROGRAM

The IWF started its Education Program in 2009 and since that time have held various seminars offering high standard lectures in different topics at World Championships. It has been a very successful program so far and in the future we wish to dedicate more attention to the Athletes' Career program, offering a special lecture in the frame of our educational seminars.

7. CONCLUSION

The IWF has taken an important step in deciding to get involved in assisting athletes during their career and also on their way to the new career after sport and weightlifting competitions.
This approach is definitively important and perfectly in line with the IOC President's view who states that "Athletes dedicate their lives to sport, often sacrificing part of their education and professional skill building. We have the responsibility to help them in this respect. It is essential to make them aware of the competences and qualities that they possess and can use in a non-sporting context." (Jacques Rogge)

Having the IWF coordinating actions in cooperation with MFs and clubs to raise awareness among coaches, athletes and their entourage about the importance of dual careers and preparing for the transition to next career is an important step. This is indeed the direction taken by the Olympic Movement and it is key that the IWF is also involved in order to reach more success early in the athletes' career and avoid them issues when retiring from sport.
Moreover, as part of the IWF Education Program a special lecture will be included in the educational seminars on the Athletes' Career Program to develop specific skills allowing athletes to feel better prepared for life after sport will also represent added-value.
Last but not least, offering specific assistance (writing a CV or a motivation letter, preparing for interviews, etc.) to athletes that are looking for a job when retiring from elite competition represents a strong signal about the new IWF's positioning.

USEFUL LINK:

International Olympic Committee, Olympic Solidarity:
http://www.olympic.org/content/olympic-athletes/athletes-space/programme/