From Medal to Certificate. A Study into the Suitability of the Strategy ‘Validation of Prior Learning’ in the Transition from an Elite Sports Career to a Second Career

Jorike Olde Looisuis, Wagner Group
Daco Woudenberg (Advisor), Wagner Group
Philip Wagner (Advisor), Wagner Group

Management - HRM (Elite Sport)  Thursday, May 30, 2019
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)        4:20 PM
Abstract 2019-140                                         Room: Napoleon D3

The National Olympic Committee & National Sport Federation (hereafter: NOC*NSF) has the ambition to ensure that the Netherlands will be ranked among the ten best sporting countries in the world. When trying to achieve this ambition it’s hardly impossible to combine an elite sports career with either study or work. In addition, (former) elite athletes can barely provide insight into the competences they have acquired during their sports career (NOC*NSF, 2016). In the contemporary ‘learning society’ it is necessary to learn continuously, also in other learning environments such as (elite) sports (MOCW, 2002).

A strategy that helps to make full use of all learning environments is called Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). It’s an assessment system which focuses on recognising, valuing, validating and developing the competences that someone has previously learned in any type of learning environment (Duvekot, 2016). The aim of this qualitative study is to determine in what way a (former) elite athlete can use VPL during the transition from an elite athlete career to a second career.

The literature study describes how VPL and an elite sports career are related to one another against the background of lifelong learning. The elite athlete’s career is looked upon from the Holistic Athletic Career (HAC) Model which considers the four phases of an elite sports career at five different levels (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). VPL is interpreted with the help of the learning triangle (Duvekot, 2016). Within this learning triangle VPL is the glue between the three actors at micro level: the (former) elite athlete, the employer and NOC*NSF. The government and the social partners are the stakeholders that play an important role at macro level. Theoretically speaking, all prerequisites are available to use VPL during the transition from elite sports career to a second career.

In order to investigate the practical possibilities and applicability of VPL for (former) elite athletes semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with experts from the professional VPL-field and from the field of elite sports. These experts have been selected being actors and stakeholders from the learning triangle. This empirical study shows that it appears that the impediments at macro-level mainly prevent the use of VPL by a(n) (former) elite athlete. VPL is relatively unknown, even with NOC*NSF. Awareness is the most important condition for the use of VPL on micro level. NOC*NSF needs to raise awareness among (former) elite athletes within the programme ‘Transition to a second career’ which manages the support for (former) elite athletes.

This study is a first exploration in the field of VPL and elite sports. A study aimed at the application of VPL should reveal whether VPL can indeed be used by (former) elite athletes and if it could be used as part of the current programme of NOC*NSF as well. The proposed study could include the outcome of the current B-Wiser study which looks at which competences former elite athletes have acquired during their elite athlete career (B-Wiser, 2017).