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## Abstract

The requirements of performance sport are becoming more and more time-consuming for athletes. Based on the work of Rosa (2013), the article looks into the ability of athletes to reconcile their training project and the increasing requirements of practice at a high level. To address this issue, we interviewed 63 French high-level athletes who train at the French Institute of Sport. The results show that although the training project appears to be time-consuming, it is nonetheless a source of social balance and a reassuring choice for their future professional retraining. In order to preserve this educational project in the time-consuming context of high performance sports, athletes on the one hand implement strategies of arrangement in order to produce an acceptable timetable, and on the other hand use this temporality as an adjustment variable allowing them to better manage temporal emergencies.

By giving athletes a voice, this work deconstructs the idea of the incompatibility of educational and sports projects and offers recommendations to sports institutions.

Title :

## **The educational project in the context of high-performance sports**

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### **1/ Introduction**

In the context of increased international competition (De Bosscher et al., 2015), the objective of this article is to examine the conditions for achieving the dual career (European Commission, 2007) of French elite athletes. In France, since the Mazeaud Law of 1975 (Honta, 2007), the involvement of high-level athletes in an academic (or professional) project has been an obligation to be managed by sports federations.

While sporting constraints are increasing, this dual career injunction raises questions. As a matter of fact, the pace of athletes' life has accelerated tremendously since the early 2000s (Burlot, Richard et Joncheray, 2016a). Top athletes must participate in more and more competitions, training sessions and camps (Bullock, 2009 ; Starkes, 2000). They also need to involve many specialists in their preparation: physical trainers, mental trainers, nutritionists (Joncheray et al., 2020 ; Mignon & Lemieux, 2006). Finally, they also need to continue to meet social requirements: seeing their family, meeting with friends, enjoying a love life (Godber, 2012). Under these conditions, we have questioned the ability of French elite athletes to reconcile their educational project with the increasing constraints of practicing at a very high level. To answer this question, we have looked more specifically at French elite athletes who train at the French Sport Institute INSEP (*Institut National du Sport, de l'Expertise et de la Performance*).

INSEP is an establishment hosting 23 French centers with nearly 600 athletes. They train and prepare for international events such as the European Championships, World Championships and Olympic Games. The premises are located in Paris on a 28-hectare site. In addition to being a training structure, INSEP provides athletes with other services: i) catering; ii) accommodation; iii) educational and socio-professional monitoring; iv) medical monitoring; v) scientific support for performance; vi) organization and management of daily life. Athletes train, eat, sleep, take care of themselves or study there.

Athletes training at INSEP are impacted by the general increase in sporting constraints. First of all, the number of training hours has increased substantially. Whereas in 1990, at INSEP, 41% of athletes trained less than 10 hours per week and 59% between 10 and 20 hours (Irlinger et al., 1990), today nearly all athletes train more than 20 hours per week (Burlot, Le Mancq, 2016b). In some sports such as rhythmic gymnastics, the number of hours can reach 35 hours per week. This increase in the amount of training, from a very young age, is now considered a key to success, even an obligation so as to be and remain successful (Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Moreover, the number of competitions with the introduction of ranking in many sports and the number of preparatory training courses conducted outside INSEP have also risen sharply to the point of having a strong impact on the time available: the number of days devoted to competitions and training courses can involve up to 180 days per year in some sports (Burlot et al., 2019

; Joncheray et al., 2019). Finally in a logic of a division of coaching labor (Joncheray et al., 2020 ; Mignon & Lemieux, 2005), athletes' coaching systems have become more professional with the participation of many specialists: physical trainers, mental trainers, data analysts, reathletization specialists. The latter claim, because of their ability to improve athletes' performance, a right to a time window to exercise their professional activity.

As a result, this triple process of increasing sporting constraints has led to increasing pressure on the time available to athletes. The pace of life has accelerated dramatically, generating feelings of fatigue, discomfort and sometimes overwork (Julla-Marcy et al., 2017).

In this context, the question of managing a dual project takes on its full meaning. In order to keep elite athletes in a professional project, some nations have chosen to give their athletes the status of professionals. Other nations, such as France, impose a dual project (Aquilina & Henry, 2010 ; De Bossher, 2015).

With this as background, we have questioned the ability of top-level athletes to carry out their educational project in the context of an increasingly time-consuming performance project.

## **2/ Theoretical background**

In order to better understand this problem of the dual project in a context where pressure on time available is increasingly strong, we will rely on the work of Rosa (2003, 2009, 2010, 2013) dealing with the social acceleration of time.

Rosa (2010b) makes time a central concept. According to him, society has entered Post-modernity in which time acceleration is a key to understanding. Rosa (2010b) explains that in Pre-modernity, time flowed according to the natural rhythm of days, seasons and years. In Modernity these rhythms were fractured by new social times: work, religion... In Post-modernity, time is no longer allowed to simply elapse, it is accelerated. Time horizons are disrupted by anticipating the future in the present time.

Rosa (2010b) says that time acceleration translates into a double process of increasing and densifying the number of acts per time unit. Not only is the time needed to perform life temporalities reduced, but their performing is also accelerated: people eat faster, move faster. This objective time acceleration "is expressed subjectively through a recrudescence in the

feeling of urgency, guilt, stress, anxiety about schedules, the need to further accelerate, the fear of "no longer being able to keep up". Alongside that comes the impression that we are not seeing our lives go by, that they are escaping us." (Rosa, 2010b, p. 380).

Rosa (2010a) explains that this acceleration causes a sense of alienation, one of its major consequences being the risk of desynchronization. This risk is characterized by the reinforcement of a social division between those who are in a frantic race for efficiency and performance and those who do not want or cannot keep up with this acceleration and, as a result, become desynchronized.

This acceleration, that is the dynamic in which individuals are pushed to always do more and better in the same time unit, takes three forms: technical acceleration (time saving provided by technology such as the Internet and transport), acceleration of social change (practices and purposes are increasingly being questioned) and acceleration of the pace of life (Rosa, 2013). The drives of acceleration are economic, political and social, and serve the cult of performance (Ehrenberg, 1991). The unnecessary is removed in order to prioritize a life organization consisting essentially of useful and efficient time (Darmon, 2013).

The world of elite sport is an ideal subject to question and mobilize this theory of social acceleration of time.

In the sociology of sport, Rosa's work (2010b) has already been mobilized to analyze high-level athletes' pace of life (Burlot, Richard et Joncheray, 2016a ; Julla-Marcy et al., 2017), that is the articulation of different temporalities that make up the athletes' life: sport, education, work, family, friends. This work has shown the objective and subjective character of the pace of life and a paradoxical relationship to time (Julla-Marcy et al., 2017). Thus, athletes with the densest schedules are not necessarily those who are most uncomfortable with their pace of life, and conversely those with the lightest schedules are not always in situations of well-being.

Being able to manage one's time becomes a key component of the champion's life and joins the concept of time master (Darmon, 2013). In order to be time masters, athletes implement two types of adaptive strategies: arrangement strategies (planning the optimum organization of the various temporalities that make up their pace of life) and adjustment strategies (being able, in action, to adjust temporalities according to hazards of different types) of their time schedules. Four types of arrangement strategy have been identified: delaying/anticipating, superimposing, suppressing/reducing some temporalities and replacing slow activities by fast activities (Burlot, Richard, Joncheray, 2016 ; Rosa, 2013).

The subject of dual project has been dealt with from different angles, but never on the basis of time sociology research. However, as early as the 1980s, researchers already questioned the effects, on extra-sport professionalization, of time spent meeting the requirements of high-level sport (Eisen & Turner, 1992).

To answer this question, a first series of studies (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003 ; Eisen & Turner, 1992;) consisted in studying the retraining of athletes in order to directly measure the effects of their elite sports career on their professional future.

In 1992, an initial study of American athletes who participated in the Olympic Games from 1920 to 1988 showed that participation in the Games was a key element in their social upward mobility (Eisen & Turner, 1992). The same type of finding was observed for German Olympic athletes (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003). However, it should be pointed out that this research concerned only a part of the elite sports population: the one with a strong reputation in reference to the model developed by Frank and Cook (1995), i.e. the most medal-winning. Thus, this research did not deal with all athletes involved in a performance project.

Although this initial research on athletes' professionalization (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003 ; Eisen & Turner, 1992) focused more on the period following the sports career and came to some rather positive conclusions, from the early 2000s onwards many researchers began to question the implementation of academic projects during a sports career. Brettsschneider (1999) noted that sporting constraints made it increasingly difficult to carry out an educational project, sporting constraints and especially the training hours to be performed being more and more important (Starkes, 2000). With this as background, several researchers criticized the lack of protection for athletes. Donnelly and Petherick (2004) showed that the temporal drifts of these sporting constraints (more training and competition) had serious consequences on athletes' education and professionalization. Giulianotti (2004) noted that many athletes jeopardized education to reach their sporting objectives. David (2005) called for the right to education for athletes.

In 1999, acknowledging its social responsibility, Europe made the education of elite athletes a priority (Aquilina ~~and~~ & Henry, 2010), in an appendix to the Treaty of Nice on the European Union. Subsequently, numerous studies were financed in Europe with a view to analyzing policies on the education of elite sportspersons (Guidotti et al., 2015) such as Education in Elite Sport in Europe (German Sports Confederation, 2004), Training of Elite Young Sportspersons in Europe (INEUM Consulting and TAJ, 2007), Education of Elite Young Sportspersons in Europe (Amara et al., 2004). The question of educational policies even became a major focus of the analysis of sports performance policies (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

In addition to these works on education provision for top-level sportsmen and women, more recent research has been carried out on the structures offering access to an educational project for elite athletes. A first series of studies has made it possible to analyze the effects of

integrating athletes in structures combining school and sports projects on their educational and sporting performance. These studies have mixed findings. Van Rens et al. (2015) showed that the Talent Top Sport system set up in Holland did not allow athletes to perform at a high level in sports and they also performed less well in their secondary and higher education. In Germany, a comparative study between Olympic athletes who attended Elite Sport Schools (ESS) and those who did not (Emrich et al., 2009) showed no effect on academic performance and rather positive effects on athletic performance. Among these studies, it is also worth highlighting those by Rubin and Mose (2017) on the social isolation of American student athletes and by Brown (2016) on social disruption and identity issues faced by athletes involved in New Zealand university programs.

A second working group focused on recruitment in these schools offering education to top-level athletes. Kristiansen and Houlihan (2017) show how, in Norway, money is a selection factor at entry and consequently limits access of the least economically endowed populations. In Denmark, Skrubbeltrang et al. (2018) highlight the decisive role of the parents' socio-professional background and sports history in the involvement of athletes in "SportsClasses". In France, Javerlhiac et al. (2010) show that interest in the dual project was highly dependent on the sport practiced.

While combining the educational project and the sports project has been treated from different angles, as far as we know no work addresses as a central issue the time management of the double project. However, in the works cited above, time is very often considered as one of the key elements in the implementation of the double project (Aquilina & Henry, 2010 ; David, 1999 ; De Bosscher et al., 2015 ; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004 ; Emrich et al, 2009). For Aquilina (2013), time management is a major issue at a time when the number of "student athletes" is growing. In the work of Viaux and Papin (2012) on athletes' health, sports time and

school time are even considered in opposition because they follow a logic of intense time constraints. Yet they can appear complementary: sacrificing one of these commitments is not necessary to succeed in the other, even though it is always at the price of some "tinkering" as Delalandre and Demeslay (2015) point out.

We are in line with these studies stressing the importance of time for a successful dual project. At the crossroads of time sociology and sports sociology, we intend to research this issue and question, with regard to the acceleration of the pace of life (Burlot, Richard et Joncheray, 2016 ; Julla-Marcy et al., 2017 ; Rosa, 2013) the place given by athletes to the educational project: What are the reasons leading athletes to engage in an educational project that objectively burdens their time schedule in the context of social acceleration of time? What types of time strategies do they implement in order to reconcile their educational project with the constraints of high sports performance?

### **3/ Method**

#### **Protocols**

To answer these questions, we have used interviews from two qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1991) conducted among high-level athletes at INSEP. The semi-structured interviews for the first survey were conducted from September 2013 to June 2014, as part of research on elite athletes' pace of life. Forty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with INSEP athletes involved (31) or having been involved (11) in educational projects. The semi-structured interviews for the second survey were conducted from March to September 2017, as part of a study on the preparation conditions of French Olympic athletes during the four years leading to the Rio Olympics. Of the 28 semi-structured interviews conducted, we

have used the 21 conducted with athletes in preparation at INSEP in order to maintain a similar organizational context, including nine attending an educational course and 12 who had attended one.

In both surveys, the athletes were questioned about their educational project, their sports performance project and, more generally, their life project. Particular attention was paid to the coordination of these different temporalities.

### **Sample**

In order to obtain a sample of athletes representing the variety of situations identified at INSEP, the choice of athletes was guided by specific but also common variables such as the variety of sports disciplines present at INSEP, gender (30 men, 33 women), age range 18 years old and under (13 athletes), 19 to 25 age range (25 athletes) and over 25 years old (25 athletes), professional situation (40 students, 23 employees). The choice of these variables made it possible to study a group of athletes in a variety of situations that are relevant for addressing the role of an educational course and its relation to athletic performance.

All ethical precautions have been taken to encourage contact and preserve the anonymity of those interviewed.

### **Tool and data collection**

The interview guide has been constructed by themes so that all aspects of athletes' sports preparation and life are addressed. The first questions dealt with the sports career (sports history). Then the different elements of sports preparation were addressed: i) training; ii) physical preparation, iii) mental preparation, iv) recovery care and v) nutrition. In addition to specific questions on time in the first survey and performance optimization in the second, a

common set of questions concerned the athletes' involvement in their preparation. Finally questions were asked about the athletes' socio-professional situation (educational and professional project) and social situation (family life and friends). The majority of interviews lasted between one hour and one hour and a half. However it is to be noted that some interviews with seasoned athletes at the end of their careers lasted more than two hours, and conversely an interview with a young athlete starting his career lasted 45 minutes.

They were transcribed in full and then analyzed by theme. Only the parts of the interviews concerning the educational project and its connection with the sports project were used in the results presented in this article.

The results are presented in two parts. The first will aim to explain the reasons leading athletes to engage in an educational project even though they are under intense time constraints. Secondly, we will analyze the adaptive strategies implemented by athletes to carry out an educational program in a context of high sports performance.

## **5/ Results and discussion**

### **5.1/ Commitment to an educational project as a source of balance**

The athletes interviewed show a strong attachment to studies. Although the degree of commitment to studies varies from one case to another, due in particular to various sporting constraints, the educational project does not appear in opposition to the sporting project, as Viaud and Papin (2012) point out, but as a source of balance. Athletes who participated in the Rio Olympic Games and who were students at the time of the event all greatly lightened their educational project during the pre-Olympic year (Burlot et al., 2017). However, all of them

believe that the educational project played an essential role in their Olympic project even if it was a source of more or less strong tensions depending on the relationship that athletes have with their studies. In the athletes' comments, five reasons appear to be essential in justifying their commitment to an educational program.

**a) A security and equilibrium function**

Being involved in educational training makes many athletes feel safe. Not betting it all on sport and building a way out appears in their comments, as illustrated by the case of this sportswoman who considers her studies as a means of securing her future, putting her commitment to sport into perspective and thus achieving a form of balance.

"I think I'm not going to make a living from my sport anyway, and then you need something to turn to, and you don't know, you can get hurt, (...) so I think it's still important to have something. And then, it allows you to have a good balance, because in sport, there are always times when it's not going well. So it allows you to have something else on the side, (...) it allows you to put things into perspective and not bet everything on sport" (woman, swimming, 21 years old).

Stopping studies can lead to increased pressure, "too much thinking" to use an athlete's words. The pressure to succeed is then placed solely on the sporting issue, which can be a problem in the event of injury or underperformance. Moreover, ending one's studies can put athletes in uncomfortable situations, as this athlete explains:

"It's better to do something else. Last year was the first time I wasn't studying (...) it was weird for me so I didn't really like it. I'd rather study at least a little bit because I'm not used to doing nothing (...) It's true, you can get bored, and that's why some people blow a fuse and want to go

back to sports training quickly because they don't have anything else to do" (woman, athletics, 28 years old).

Athletes explain that studying offers other centers of interest, as an extra-sports activity allowing them to escape and get away from sports pressures.

"I feel like if you only do sports, there are times in the day when you don't do anything. I find that for me it's not the best. (...) I feel it's good to have a double project. It's good to have something else to do on the side, to have classes, other occupations" (man, taekwondo, 23 years old).

#### **b) A social function**

Attachment to studies also stems from the social equilibrium that they generate. They provide additional space for socialization. The high school students interviewed, who had spent schooling periods alone remotely with a tutor, said it was a difficult experience. They expressed feelings of loneliness that made them all want to go back to integrated schooling, in a classroom with other students, as this athlete says:

"They organized a class just for me. I was all alone in class. I had a private teacher. I hated it. In the morning I got up, I had to go to class by myself, ... it was really hard. This year, we're in a class of four and it's already much better.

*And how did you put up with that?*

I don't know, I had to do it anyway, I had to go to school, be alone. Now at the end of the second year I'm better adapted, I know more people, it's more pleasant" (male, skater, 15 years old).

School education has a sociability function. It enables athletes to form relationships with athletes from other sports, to integrate into other social networks and get out of their activity "to see other faces" (man, rowing, 27 years old).

For these sportsmen and women, carrying out studies therefore generates significant social benefits which, associated with the security and equilibrium function previously demonstrated, tone down the excesses highlighted by Donnelly and Petherick (2004) and Giulianotti (2004). However, as we shall see below, this does not always correspond to a personal choice on their part.

**c) Studying in response to parental requirements**

Attachment to education also varies according to the extent parents value it. The more parents value the educational project, the more athletes say they feel pressure to be successful at school. This is explained by one of the athletes: "In sports science, I did my first year over two years (...), if you do that every year, you'll pass your 3-year degree in 6 years. But for my parents, it was not an option, they told me: 'OK, we don't mind if you do it this way for the first year, but that means that for the following ones, you will do the whole syllabus'. And it's true that the second year was very complicated" (female, rowing, 22 years old).

In this case, responding to parental requirements allows athletes to retain their parents' support and preserve the family equilibrium they believe is indispensable.

**d) A way of satisfying one's own beliefs: the case of studious athletes.**

Attachment to studies also varies according to the level of academic commitment desired by athletes. This commitment is sometimes independent of the aforementioned functions and the

more or less intense pressure imposed by parents with regard to studies. The interviews reveal some athletes are more studious than others.

For some of them, the educational project is not a priority. They always compromise, agree to take more time, sometimes give up educational projects or postpone them. In everyday life, they do not try to meet school constraints. Their sports project is a priority, although they usually continue their education.

For studious athletes, the situation is more difficult because their educational project is often just as important to them as their sports project. Not committing to it the way they would like to is a source of guilt and stress. If their studies are not subject to adjustment, they will not decide on their own to drop the academic constraints. They apply the rule without compromising, and they feel guilty when they cannot apply it. This situation increases stress and creates heavy workloads: it is therefore sometimes difficult to reconcile school and training constraints. In this kind of situation, sacrifices are made in relation to other temporalities: "It's complicated in periods of exams. Three weeks before I left for the World Cup in Rio, I had to take exams. I was very stressed because I wanted to train for the World Cup and I also wanted to pass my exams. It was a dilemma. There were two of us in the same situation. We went to see the coach together because it's always better when several of us talk to the coach. So we were able to take some time from training to study" (male, table tennis, 22).

#### **e) A solution to benefit from INSEP services**

Taking an educational course is often a decisive condition for access to the INSEP boarding school. As the number of places available is limited, a selection has to be made among athletes applying for the boarding school. Those involved in training at INSEP are favored by the institution. Discontinuing studies or finding a job places athletes in unfavorable conditions as

regards their staying at the boarding school. Even if they show strong attachment to their studies, some of them enroll in educational courses by default or stagger their studies over a significant number of years with the aim of remaining in an educational project.

As a conclusion to this first part, attachment to studies is important, although it is uneven among the athletes interviewed. Carrying out an educational project is indeed time-consuming, but it also places the athlete in a situation of well-being, which raises the question of objective time and subjective time (Rosa, 2010). As Julla-Marcy et al. (2017) points out, the densest schedules do not systematically generate feelings of discomfort, quite the contrary. Dropping an educational project objectively lightens the time schedule but can create feelings of discomfort. All athletes have found in studying a source of internal motivation (personal project, security, equilibrium, social function...) or external motivation (parental pressure...). However, this does not prevent them from also considering studying as an adjustment variable when they are in situations of intense time constraints. Depending on the value each person attributes to studies, arrangements and adjustments are a variable source of tension. The studious sometimes find it difficult to do a year's study over two years or fail to hand over an assignment when others with a strong professional project do not hesitate to adjust and modify their schedule, or even sometimes attend an educational course by default as explained in the following part.

## **5.2/ Time adaptation strategies specific to high-level athletes**

To meet their educational objectives in a context of high sports performance, the multiplication of default educational courses, the staggering of studies over time and the reorganization of sports time appear as the three key elements of arrangement strategies (Burlot, Richard and joncheray, 2016) deployed by athletes. Finally, studies also appear to be a preferred adjustment strategy when the sports project requires more time.

#### **a) Losing time to save time**

The range of educational courses offered by INSEP is limited in comparison to the whole range of courses on offer in the French school and university market. They are either internal to INSEP, or external with arrangements (specific schedules, non-compulsory attendance, distance learning, etc.), or external without any arrangement.

Faced with the obligation of a double project (Honta, 2007), if athletes do not enroll in an educational course offered at INSEP, they must arrange themselves to carry out an outside educational course. If the athlete chooses an educational course without arrangement, the educational project may not be validated by the sports federation. However, although there are agreements between INSEP and external courses of study allowing substantial arrangements (physiotherapy school and others), or even distance learning (engineering school), external studies do not necessarily attract athletes who certainly see them as the desired educational course but also often as a course that could be more complicated to carry out due to additional travel constraints, organizational constraints and the isolation generated by distance learning.

Within some INSEP sports centers, the educational project remains the athlete's own but for others, it must above all be compatible with training and competition constraints. This is why some coaches and/or managers advise against or refuse to involve their athletes in certain

educational courses, or even set up conditions for sporting success before accepting this type of dual project. This is the case of a sportswoman whose condition set by the sports center to let her enroll in a physiotherapy course was to obtain a World Championship title.

"I've wanted to do physiotherapy for a long time. After getting your high school certificate, you can go to physiotherapy school via STAPS (a university scientific course around sports), with a specialty in physiotherapy at INSEP. So that's what I did, except that you need a motivation letter from the federation and in fact when I applied to the school they told me they thought I was going to focus more on studies than on sports. So I had to be senior World Champion or go to the Olympic Games so that they would allow me to enter physiotherapy school. (...) That year, we became Senior World Team Champions. So I went back to them and I went to school in September" (woman, pentathlete, 26 years old).

Difficulties associated with studying abroad lead sports coaches as well as athletes themselves to choose default educational courses offered at INSEP and postpone their real educational project until later.

"Well, I guess if I wasn't an elite athlete, I wouldn't necessarily do the studies I do. I do studies that I like, but that I also chose because they were compatible with my sport and it was offered at INSEP..." (man, badminton, 26 years old).

In addition, there is also the challenge for athletes to maintain the status of athletes in education. For some of them, taking an educational course becomes a strategy to maximize their chances to stay at INSEP, thus benefiting from training and organizational conditions that they consider optimal. The relationship high-level athletes develop with higher education then becomes particular: less focused on the duration of their studies, they do not hesitate to take several complementary educational courses during their sports career, which does not mean that they

are failing academically (Emrich et al., 2009 ; Van Rens et al., 2015) but confirms the difficulty of doing a desired educational course (Guilianotti, 2004) without integrating it into a strategic vision of time (Darmon, 2013; Burlot, Richard and joncheray, 2016). The utilitarian vision of studying is shifting: it is no longer only the diploma itself that is targeted, but the fact of being in education, and therefore being able to benefit from the advantages provided by enrolment in an educational course.

### **b) Staggering studies; a way to reconcile educational and sports projects**

In order to cope with overloaded schedules, staggering the years of the educational course is one of the strategies put in place to reconcile educational and sports projects.

With the exception of athletes who stagger their studies in order to remain in training at INSEP, staggering is often felt as necessary to be able to reconcile education and training. Soon, these athletes do not conceive of doing otherwise. However, this situation often triggers a feeling of guilt: that of not being able to study within the same time frame as others, as this athlete suggests:

"I did my first year in three years, and now I've just moved on to second year. Only, my last two years, I'm not going to do them in 4 years, I'm going to do them in 3 years because they offered it to me. So in the end, I'm going to get back on my feet and do a 3-year course in 6 years. That way, the year that I will have repeated will not count in the total" (male, kayaker, 22 years old).

### **c) Re-organizing sports time; another way to reconcile projects.**

In order to cope with difficult schedules, some athletes, mainly in sports where training is done independently, gradually reverse the generally established order and organize their training according to their school program. Interviews show that changing training schedules in order to go to class is not uncommon. In this case, the athletes concerned are led to train on their own or in small groups, with or without a coach and at staggered times.

"I often train alone. In fact, we have a training program in my discipline that allows me to schedule my training according to my class hours. And the coach doesn't necessarily have to be present. I can stay late in the evening or come on weekends, sometimes alone (...). There are times when we have to be there but we're pretty much on our own" (man, shooting, 23 years old).

To conclude, the various strategies identified to reconcile the educational and sports projects feed the debate on the complementarity of the dual project's temporalities (Aquilina, 2013). They are in line with the figure of the time master (Darmon, 2013; Julla-Marcy et al., 2017). However, this situation should not hide the risks of overwork and alienation (Rosa, 2010) that occur when the pace of life continues to accelerate and becomes unsustainable.

#### **d) Studying: an adjustment variable**

In addition to being a strongly mobilized element in athletes' arrangement strategies (Burlot, Richard and Joncheray, 2016), studying appears quite regularly as a preferred adjustment variable.

The adjustment function of studies makes it possible to manage the coordination of temporalities in daily life, as studying is an activity that the athlete can deal with more easily compared to training. Many high-level athletes explain arriving late to class or even missing

some classes whereas they would not allow themselves to miss a training session. Behind this choice, the need for time to recover is often put forward as a justification:

"...sometimes I tend to skip school a little too much. (...) Well yeah, you're tired in class, it's not easy. (...) I couldn't do classes after training on and on (...) I was tired and I needed a rest. It was something really restorative for us athletes" (male, boxing, 29 years old).

It is the same for this athlete for whom class is a real adjustment variable with which he knows he can play whenever he feels the need to. For him, skipping a class is a way to recover sleeping time.

"You can't skip a training session, objectively you can't (...). As a result, it's easier to skip class, as skipping training is impossible, and then you get yelled at. (...) classes, well, she scolds and stuff, we have to justify, but..." (male, judo, 20 years old).

This adjustment function of studies does not prevent this athlete from having a true professional project and attaching considerable importance to his educational training. He does not wish to discontinue his studies in order to devote himself solely to his sporting project. For him, even if he allows himself a certain number of deviations, studies are both a source of equilibrium and security.

As many athletes express in the interviews, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile studies and sport, but for many leaving school is also a source of pressure and stress.

The same temporality can therefore have an adjustment function (Burlot, Richard and Joncheray, 2016) and at the same time provide some form of security and equilibrium. This is why some of the athletes who do not always attend class nevertheless take their educational project seriously.

## **Conclusion**

This work sheds light on the time management of the double project. It highlights the various functions and stakes that top-level athletes attribute to their educational project. One might believe that studying is a source of stress and tension for athletes, that they add a burden, extra temporality to an already saturated schedule. In reality, although they are unquestionably time-consuming, they contribute to athletes' development and equilibrium by meeting internal motivations (personal project, security, social equilibrium) and by providing solutions to external pressures (such as parental pressure...). Studies allow some athletes to put themselves in a reassuring position. The dual project provides a way out "just in case" the sports career should stop earlier than expected, while gradually preparing for a post-sports career. This is one of the reasons explaining the wide-spread attachment to studies among all the athletes interviewed. However, some athletes take an educational course by default for the sole purpose of benefiting from INSEP services. But even for them, the completion of a default educational course is a way of keeping busy so that they do not get bored.

In order to carry out their educational project, athletes play with the system rules and set up arrangement strategies with the aim of producing an acceptable schedule. However, being motivated for an educational project does not imply that they never dodge the rules of the educational project. Some athletes use this temporality as an adjustment variable allowing them to better manage difficult periods and intense time constraints. The study time then gives them room for manoeuvre and sometimes even a reserve of time to face the unexpected.

The present study enriches reflections on the complementarity of sports and educational temporalities (Aquilina, 2013). It also feeds the debate on the relationship to time (Elias, 1996). The most accelerated paces (Julla-Marcy et al., 2017 ; Rosa, 2010) do not necessarily create

uncomfortable situations. According to athletes, on the contrary, commitment to an accelerated life project generates well-being. However, this attitude questions performance society (Ehrenberg, 1991) and reinforces the thesis of time's alienating acceleration (Rosa, 2010a). The case of athletes who enroll in default educational courses in order to maintain equilibrium is to be explored as a driving force behind the social acceleration of time (Rosa, 2013).

Despite athletes' interest in the educational project, one may wonder to what extent they will be able to keep the double project going. This situation has been criticized by the EU as a form of unfair competition (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). As a matter of fact, the context of international competition in which athletes are involved requires them to compete with athletes who do not face the obligation of professional training and dual project. As De Bosscher et al. (2008) explains, some nations professionalize their athletes very early on so that they can therefore fully meet the increasing sporting constraints. On the other hand, this situation raises the question of the limits of time acceleration imposed on sportsmen and women with an educational project. To what extent will they be able to maintain the educational temporality in their schedules? How far will they be able to accelerate their pace of life without falling into overwork or even burnout?

These questions are eminently problematic and lead us to offer a number of recommendations to help athletes and sports institutions better understand and manage this situation. The recommendations aim to update the interest and difficulties of educational projects in the context of performance sport.

By letting athletes speak, we have found that the involvement of athletes in an educational project is not necessarily a factor of lower performance. For many of the athletes interviewed, the educational project proved to be a source of balance and protection. It therefore seems necessary that sports institutions take note of this situation, listen more carefully to the actors

who produce sports performances and trust them. Confidence and listening to athletes is undoubtedly the first lesson that can be drawn from this study. This research shows that athletes are actors in their trajectory and that the figure of the champion is often associated with mastery of time: the athlete capable of planning in complete autonomy and responsibility the coordination of the different temporalities of his performance and more broadly of his life.

However, since not all athletes are masters of time, several courses of action seem important to institutionalize in order to provide them with the best possible support.

Thus, the implementation of support units for the life project of athletes could make it possible to best support them in building their autonomy. Indeed, athletes are not all endowed with the same dispositions and capacities, and can be blinded by their sporting and educational objectives. The case of studious athletes shows the advantage of a third person able to help them take a step back.

In this perspective, we also suggest the implementation of an athlete education program to support them in learning the skills necessary for professional sports activity. These studies would allow them to acquire the knowledge and challenges of performance sport and thus help them to become enlightened actors in their career, particularly on the issue of their educational project.

Finally, we suggest the training of executives (coaches and more generally sports staff members) to help them better understand the diversity of situations and lifestyles and the interest in responding to the educational aspirations of athletes.

Beyond offering recommendations, this work also opens up prospects for future research. It would seem opportune to undertake research on the points of view of coaches and other sports staff members towards the educational project and on the way they conceive of the coordination of temporalities.

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